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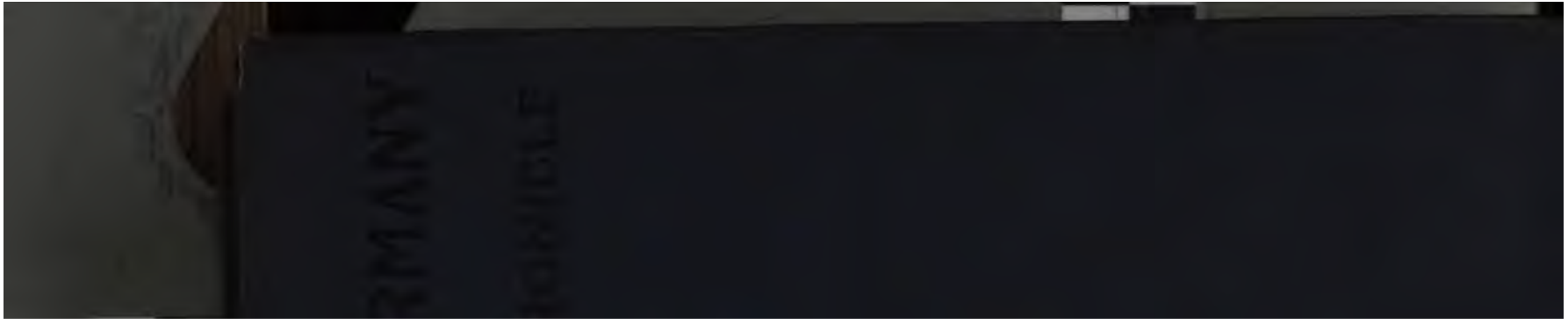

Fiction (English)

61 -

Gift

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MARCIA IN GERMANY

AN INDISCREET CHRONICLE

LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN
MCMVIII

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WARNING

THE writer of these chronicles feels that some apology is due to sensitive readers for the frequent use of words associated in England chiefly with the servants' hall and the literature provided for its delectation. It is, however, impossible to represent the section of German society under discussion without employing expressions which form the foundation stones of its conversation. Just as there is, perhaps suggestively, no equivalent in the German language for 'gentleman' or for 'sport,' so there is, perhaps equally suggestively, no way in English of conveying the German use of such words as 'aristocrat,' 'noble' (in reference to rank), and 'young ladies,' except by the rigidly literal translation of the words themselves. To English sensibility the result will doubtless be jarring; but we have it on the authority of Lord Chesterfield that 'every man of sense imitates and conforms to the local propriety to be observed in all companies.'

CHAPTER I

THE afternoon express had just steamed in under the glass roof of Waldberg station. The capital of a small German state, without the advertisements of hot-water springs, a casino, or even a cathedral, Waldberg had been passed over by the great plague of Continental tourists, and had remained immune from the invasion of American globe-trotters and an English colony.

Though outside his own country the German tourist swarms everywhere, blocking the trains with his execrable holland-covered luggage, and pervading the hotels with his still more execrable manners, in his lawful territory he travels little, and rarely lives at a distance from the place of his business or profession. It was therefore not surprising that only a small number of people descended on to the Waldberg platform. Among them one passenger was especially noticeable, from the fact that she was obviously a stranger in the country, and as conspicuous in her surroundings as an orchid in a cabbage-bed. She was tall and alert, with that well-shaped slimness of outline, equally devoid of angularity and fat, which is rarely to be found outside the British Isles, and never in the Fatherland. Her neat,

well-cut, and entirely suitable costume also proclaimed her nationality.

The girl, after hastily assuring herself that no porter was near, managed with the help of a fellow-passenger to transfer her hand-baggage from the corridor to the platform, and was about to start off in search of her registered luggage, when she heard her name, 'Miss Cheswick, Mees, Mees!' and turned to meet a small lady who had hurried down the platform after her.

The Gräfin von Rühlheim-Hochburg, her prospective hostess and her mother's old school-friend, was an extraordinary figure, and such as could only be found among the aristocracy of a small German town. Her face, with its small and really beautiful features, and its smooth, unlined complexion, might have belonged to a young woman. It was, however, disfigured by a profusion of ridiculous corkscrew curls, surmounted by a crude hat with trails of faded flowers, of the type Sunday-school children affect. Her figure, which had been permitted to escape bounds and to bulge in the wrong places, was draped in a white muslin frock, trailing at the back, but short enough in front to display long pointed shoes, turned up at the tips, and devoid of heels. This absurd juvenility of dress counteracted the first impression of youth, but, despite it, no one could have doubted the Gräfin's good breeding, or have overlooked her charm of expression and manner.

'My man Karl is at the entrance,' the Gräfin remarked, after having greeted Marcia Cheswick cordially. 'I did not bring him on to the platform, as one must pay ten pfennig admittance,

but we can carry these things ourselves to the entrance.'

She seized the hold-all and dressing-case in her cotton-gloved hands, and walked off with the elastic step of youth, while Marcia followed, wondering at the economy which considers a penny, and can yet afford a manservant.

Karl, a brawny youth with a large moustache, white cotton gloves, and a well-worn livery breaking out all over into coroneted buttons, relieved them of their encumbrances, and was directed to have the rest of the luggage brought to the house by an out-porter. The Gräfin evidently considered cabs also in the light of an extravagance, but Marcia was glad to stretch herself after the long journey, and to see something of the town which was to be her home for the next year.

It was a fine autumn day, and the whole place looked gay and bright with a gaiety never to be found in a British town. The broad streets were lined with shady limes, and every spare corner was utilised and converted into brilliant flower-beds. It struck her as a curious anomaly that the German should show so much taste in the beautifying and embellishing of his towns, and so lamentably little in all personal adornment.

The Gräfin kept up an uninterrupted flow of conversation as they walked along, but the eccentricity of her English pronunciation demanded too great an effort of attention, and Marcia soon gave up listening, and devoted herself to the novelty of her surroundings.

A large café came into sight, with round tables dotted on the pavement. Groups of officers and

students in gaudy caps were seated at the tables, drinking beer and smoking. They all jumped up as the Gräfin approached, saluted and swept off their caps with ostentatious deference, while Marcia was conscious of the undisguised stare which followed her down the street. She was insular enough to consider staring unwarrantably bad manners, but she subsequently discovered that the German girls of her acquaintance regarded it as a tribute to their appearance and fascinations.

Naturally, the English 'Mees,' who was to stay with the Gräfin von Rühlheim-Hochburg and to be introduced into society—the first of her nationality to take such a plunge at Waldberg—was of absorbing interest in the small town. Within the narrow circle of those who considered themselves the elect, there were so few novelties and sensations to talk about, and such a lust for talking, that every triviality was eagerly seized upon. In a community where the discussion of ladies in the messrooms and cafés was not only tolerated, but formed one of the chief topics of conversation, it was hardly surprising that the English girl should be subjected to a fire of comment from the representative assembly outside the Café Heintz.

With no definite claim to beauty, Marcia Cheswick was quite pleasing enough in appearance to represent her nation creditably in a town where the 'English Mees' was only known through the medium of the German comic papers—a medium which invariably presents her with a large flat figure, large flat feet, and large, but not flat, teeth.

One of the young officers, who was watching the retreating figures through his eyeglass, turned to his companion, and remarked in the nasal voice considered *chic* among a section of the German army:

'A smart turn-out, the English Mees, but too thin for my taste.'

The other, a man with prominent eyes, and a gross mouth revealed by his upturned moustache, assented:

'These English are always scraggy. Now I like a full, ample figure in a woman. For a man it is different; he must keep down his weight, or pay a fabulous sum for his horse-flesh.'

Here Otto von Brösewick broke into the conversation. He was small and lean, and looked like a jockey in the uniform of a German dragoon. He had more money than his comrades, kept several racers, frequented all the meetings in clothes made by an English tailor, and sprinkled his conversation with English words.

'Allow me,' he exclaimed. 'Fat women are not "smart." See what they look like in "tailor-mades." Our women haven't a notion how to dress, except the *demi-mondaines* in Berlin and Hamburg. In England, I believe, even the respectable women are "smart."'

'And the men have to pay,' remarked the first speaker, Graf Radwitz, looking complacently at his white, manicured hands. 'I do not want the girls one has to choose one's wife from to be "smart." It costs too much money, and is a temptation to their morals. No, I shall choose a nice, soft, round girl, of the best family, of

course, and perfectly innocent. What I want her to know about things I shall tell her myself. These "smart" girls know too much. They expect admiration and attention instead of looking after us, and gad about in expensive clothes when they ought to be at home looking after the house.'

'Well, the English Mees won't do for you, Graf,' Brösewick remarked. 'She would not swallow "la petite Jenny," and might make awkward inquiries.'

The Graf looked sulky at this bantering allusion, which he considered an impertinence on the part of a man who was merely of the 'new nobility,' to himself who was a count with sixteen quarterings, and with royal blood in his veins. He was, however, not quick enough to think of the withering snub he would have liked to administer, and Brösewick continued, turning to young Rühlheim-Hochburg, who had subsequently joined his comrades:

'Your gracious mother will probably reserve her for you. You will have all the chances, as she is staying in your house; and she is rich—all the English are rich.'

Ulrich von Rühlheim shifted uneasily in his chair, while a look of genuine fear passed over his face. He was an extraordinarily handsome young man, with eloquent blue eyes, a slow tongue, and a slower brain. This combination had landed him in innumerable difficulties with the other sex, from which he had not the wit to extract himself without his mother's assistance and the whole town hearing of the event. The result of these

experiences was that he regarded all eligible females brought to his notice with a nervous apprehension lest he should be their selected prey.

Otto von Brösewick, having demonstrated his sharpness by making two of his companions uncomfortable, flicked a speck of dust off his uniform (which he was glad to observe was of better cloth and cut than the Graf's, despite the sixteen quarterings), and saluting airily, sauntered off. Von Rühlheim, who knew his mother would expect him back, and would be hurt at his non-appearance, also left; while the Graf, who had an appointment with 'la petite Jenny,' paid for his drinks and disappeared in the opposite direction.

Meanwhile Marcia had followed the Gräfin through a dark entrance, and up two flights of unadorned stone steps, to her flat on the second floor. The door was immediately opened by Karl —still in his white cotton gloves—who had hurried back by a short cut. After inquiring whether her sons were in, and hearing that the Herr Leutnant was out, but that the Herr Graf was in his room, the Gräfin ushered Marcia into the salon.

One glance showed that it was uncompromisingly ugly, of a type associated in her mind with Early-Victorian lodging-houses. The suite, upholstered in maroon rep, consisted of straight-backed chairs, placed round a table in the middle of the room, and a hideously uncomfortable sofa, on which reposed two hard cushions with red cross-stitch coronets embroidered over their covers. The only redeeming features were a magnificent Blüthner grand piano, and two life-size oil portraits, which covered a large expanse of the

abominable drab wall-paper. The one of the late Graf, painted during the period when he belonged to the Garde-Cuirassiers, showed him in the imposing white gala uniform of that elect corps, and was tolerably well executed. The other, which represented the Gräfin in the prime of her life and beauty, was a really fine picture, and alone would have raised the room above the lodging-house level. Upon every article of furniture were strewn faded laurel wreaths tied with gaudy ribbons; for the Gräfin, after dallying with innumerable hobbies, had devoted herself passionately to poetry, and would recite her compositions to any audience she could obtain. As in addition to her title, and a privileged intimacy with the reigning family, she possessed a happy knack of rhyming, she was soon the acknowledged poet of Waldberg, and could reel off an ode to the birth of a royal infant, or a dirge on the death of a pet dog, at the shortest notice and without the least trouble.

Marcia had only effected a hurried survey of the room when the door opened, and the Gräfin's younger son, Ernst, entered. He belonged to the most select student Corps, and had a scarred face and watery eyes; but whereas he lacked his brother's good looks, he possessed double his brain, which, however, he considered it plebeian to use. He was attired in a bright green suit, with loose trousers, swallow-tail coat, and low waistcoat displaying a large expanse of embroidered shirt-front. He also wore a ready-made tie of brilliant hue, and magenta boots, which, like those of his mother, turned up at the tips. Across

his shirt-front was the three-coloured ribbon of his Corps, and he carried his student's cap of sky-blue in his hand. He was considered a 'blood' by his companions, and set the fashion among the civilians of the town. It was as well that the Waldberg fashion could be led in ready-made clothes; even so, Ernst was sufficiently in debt, a fact which up to now he had managed to keep from his mother.

'My son Ernst—the English Mees,' the Gräfin said, and Ernst clicked his heels together, made a deep bow, and favoured Marcia with a protracted look of sentimental admiration, which he had never known miss fire with the German girls of his acquaintance. Marcia, however, was thinking that his face, with its criss-cross of half-healed scars, looked like a piece of raw meat, and that his clothes were the most atrocious she had ever seen.

'You will be tired after your journey,' the Gräfin said. 'I will show you your room, and then you will doubtless like to rest and unpack your things. Supper this evening is at six o'clock, as my son Uli is going to the opera.'

She opened a door on the opposite side of the corridor, and Marcia found herself in a fair-sized room, with brown walls, bare parquet floor, and only the most necessary articles of furniture. It was, however, light and airy, and looked into a stone-paved courtyard with a big lime-tree in the middle.

'I must read you my poem on the destruction of that tree, which was to have been cut down to enlarge the stables at the back. As you see, however, it was spared.'

'Did you have to alter your poem in consequence?' Marcia inquired.

'Oh no! That would have been a pity,' the Gräfin replied naïvely. 'But I must not stop now, you will want a rest. *Auf Wiedersehen* till supper,' and she closed the door and went off to her various duties and occupations.

After having removed the traces of the journey, and attired herself in a becoming crêpe de chine gown, Marcia went across to the drawing-room. Luckily, she was devoid of all shyness and embarrassment, but she had not yet felt her footing in this new household, or sized up the people among whom she was to live for the next twelve months. Though this was by no means her first visit to Germany, her previous experiences had been of tours with her parents, devoted to sightseeing; and, in her memory, the towns they had seen consisted only of cathedrals, picture-galleries, and hotels. She realised that it is possible to travel for years in this manner without learning to know any country, or the people who inhabit it. This was, in fact, what her father liked. He often said how charming Germany would be if it were not for the German people, and he ignored their existence as much as possible when travelling in their country. 'The most beautiful in architecture and art is beyond the question of nationality,' he would remark, 'and as in hotels the people with whom you come chiefly into contact are waiters, and waiters are German everywhere, I don't notice the difference between German hotels and others.' Her mother, on the other hand, had always retained a partiality for Germans, which

dated from the time of her girlhood, when she and the young Baroness Adelgunde von Westhausen had sworn eternal friendship. This friendship had gone the way of most attachments formed between schoolgirls. Adelgunde, who was beautiful and sweet-tempered, had married the aide-de-camp of the reigning prince, and until her husband died was entirely taken up with the exigencies of a Court life and the demands of her two sons. Meanwhile, her English friend had returned to her home, and had committed the fatal error of marrying a man with no profession, a cultivated artistic temperament, and an irascible temper. Shortly after the birth of their only child, he had insisted upon selling their house, and travelling; and then succeeded many weary years, when Mrs. Cheswick had to confide her little daughter to the care of relatives, and trapese round Europe with her selfish and artistic husband. As soon as Marcia was old enough, she had joined her parents. 'She will obtain a far better education by travelling and being in my society,' her father had declared, 'than if she went to the best schools.' She certainly did gain a knowledge of character and a precocious insight into those things which are beneath the surface. She soon realised with what silent pluck her mother bore a life which was distasteful to her, how deeply she felt their homeless condition, and how wearisome she found the constant packings and unpackings, and the squabbles with hotel menials, which her husband, despite his artistic sensitiveness, was always incurring. Mrs. Cheswick had often thought of her old friend Adelgunde,

but in this, as in most other matters, her interests had given way to those of her husband. She was therefore pleased and touched when she received a letter from the Gräfin. 'Though I have not written, you must not think that I have forgotten you, dear friend,' she wrote. 'When my husband died, I had to see to the upbringing of my sons, and my time was not my own. Now that they are grown up, I have more leisure, and I want to ask you to spare me your Marcia for a really long visit. Leave her with me, when your husband drags you off to the wilds.' This was the only reference to Mr. Cheswick, between whom and the Gräfin there existed a mutual animosity; but as he had planned a tour for that winter through Mexico and the Southern States, and found that the cost was more than he had anticipated, he told his wife to accept the invitation. Marcia herself was by no means averse from this arrangement. Though she was possessed of real artistic feeling, and enjoyed the beauties they journeyed over Europe to see, people were more interesting to her than places. She disliked her father, and still more the crowd he gathered round him, whom he called his friends: social inferiors, who realised that gross flattery to a vain man was the means of procuring good dinners and a social lift.

'How father would jeer at this room!' Marcia thought, as she looked round; but her reflections were interrupted by the sound of voices, and the opening of the double doors which connected the salon with the Gräfin's sanctum, through which the Gräfin herself appeared.

'You must come in here,' she said, taking

Marcia's arm. 'We don't often sit in the salon, and I want to introduce my eldest son to you.'

The study, despite its threadbare carpet and furniture, was a far pleasanter room. The walls were lined with bookcases, and a large writing-table in the window was littered with papers, and the Gräfin's writing appliances. Ernst was sitting in a chair with a cigarette in his mouth, and Uli stood near the table. Marcia guessed from their sudden constraint that she had been the topic of conversation.

'My eldest son, Ulrich,' the Gräfin said with obvious pride, and Marcia held out her hand, relieved to see that he did not resemble his brother.

Uli, though secretly terrified of the English girl, and of any overtures she might make to him, had enough superficial *savoir faire* to disguise the fact, and—Karl having announced supper and flung open another door—he offered his arm solemnly to Marcia, while the Gräfin followed with Ernst.

The dining-room was large and bare, with a small round table in the middle of the room, and a raised platform at one end, partitioned off by a wooden railing. After they were seated, Marcia noticed that the table-cloth was embroidered with texts in red cotton, and that she was the only one of the party who had dressed. The meal consisted of soup, with large pieces of suet floating in it, a plate of cold meat and sausages, and a glass dish of fruit. Karl waited in his white cotton gloves, and listened to the conversation with a sympathetic interest.

As neither of her sons could talk English, the

Gräfin was reluctantly obliged to speak German, a language in which Marcia was tolerably proficient, and only needed practice to become fluent.

'I am giving a little impromptu party on Friday,' the Gräfin remarked, taking a second helping of soup. 'I want you to make the acquaintance of our friends before we start on the official preliminaries to your introduction at Court.'

Marcia thanked her in a few suitable words, and hoped she was not giving a great deal of trouble.

'But how exquisitely gnädiges Fräulein speaks German!' Ernst exclaimed enthusiastically. He had been trying in vain to catch her eye over the top of the fruit-dish, and to express his admiration of her in a fervent glance.

'You are so polite in this country,' Marcia replied coolly, 'that all foreigners speak your language perfectly.'

'But I assure gnädiges Fräulein she does,' Ernst insisted rather lamely. He was not accustomed to having his compliments received in this spirit; and indeed he considered himself an expert in every branch of feminine conquest. His amours, though less publishable than those of his brother, had been managed with greater skill and smaller publicity.

'I suppose Graf Radwitz and all the others of your regiment are coming?' the Gräfin asked Uli, who was silent and preoccupied.

'I don't know about Radwitz,' he answered. 'He has so many engagements, that I can't say.'

'What engagements can he have?' the Gräfin inquired. 'We know all the social and regimental engagements there are.' She was the one woman in Waldberg who did not gossip, and was quite ignorant of the scandals circulating through the town. Uli blushed and looked embarrassed, and in order to change the subject, turned to Marcia for the first time.

'Is gnädiges Fräulein fond of music?' he asked. 'There is a splendid opera here.'

Marcia declared that she was enthusiastically fond of the opera and of Wagner, and thought what a charming expression he had. Nature had kindly disguised the fact that she had omitted to supply him with an adequate allowance of brains; and since a long social routine had equipped him with enough conversation to fill in the pauses between dances and the courses of a dinner, there were some people who had not discovered the omission.

'Oh, the opera is dull,' Ernst declared, fixing his napkin firmly under his chin, and holding his roll in the hollow of his left hand, while he buttered it vigorously with his right. 'Gnädiges Fräulein must come to see our "Corpshaus," and we will show her what a grand thing is the life of the German student.'

'Shall I recite my Fairy Story in Verse on Friday?' the Gräfin asked meditatively, 'or give an account of our last travels in Italy? I took some photographs which could be handed round.' The Gräfin delivered lectures on her little jaunts in the most tourist-ridden tracks, as if they had been adventures in the heart of Africa.

Ernst grinned sarcastically, but Uli looked at his mother with devoted admiration, and said gently: 'Whatever you do, mamma, will be interesting. Are you going to have any music?'

'Yes; that poor young Schmidt wants an opportunity of being heard. But you must be going now, Uli, or you will be late for the opera.'

They rose from the table, and the two young men bowed and shook hands with Marcia, and wished her the *Gesegnete Mahlzeit*, without which no German meal can be completed; and after each had imprinted a kiss on their mother's hand, they all repaired to the study together.

Uli soon excused himself on the plea that he did not wish to miss the overture, and Ernst, rejoicing that he now had the field to himself, wondered how much progress he could make with the English Mees in one evening—a good deal, he hoped, as he had given up a *Bierkneipe* on her account. He was, therefore, greatly disgusted when the Gräfin remarked that her guest was looking pale, and asked her if she would like to retire. Marcia, who was beginning to feel the effects of her journey, was glad to have the opportunity of escaping. She made a curtsy to the Gräfin, which she had been told was the correct thing to do, and offered her hand perfunctorily to Ernst. He held it in his moist, soft palm, and murmured something about his heart and her eyes, which she failed to understand, but gathered that he was paying her one of his insufferable compliments.

As she was brushing her hair, she heard him in

angry altercation with Karl. 'Were there no letters for me this evening, you fool?'

Then Karl's meek reply: 'Yes, one, Herr Graf.'

'Well, where the devil is it?'

'I put it on the table in the Frau Gräfin's study.'

'How often must I tell you, you ass, that I will not have my letters put with those of the Frau Gräfin, or of the Herr Leutnant either—you infernal idiot!'

She could hear Karl, who had been Uli's soldier servant, click his heels together and say in the expressionless voice acquired by military discipline: '*Zu Befehl, Herr Graf*,' and then the sound of the front door banging, and steps getting fainter in the distance.

CHAPTER II

ERNST woke up next morning with a racking headache, and conscious of an unpleasant moral and physical flavour. He had tried to drown his cares in beer, and had taken even more than his usual ample allowance. The letter, which Karl had by mistake put with those of the Gräfin, was, as Ernst feared, a dunning communication of the most urgent description; and following upon this, a sheaf of unpaid bills had been sent in as last reminders, with the polite but pressing request that the Herr Graf would see his way to settling them immediately.

Ernst owned with a curse that he was in a horrible fix. His mother, though generous and easy-going, was in no position to help him, allowing that she would wish to do so. Her income was exceedingly modest, and even with the practice of the strictest economy it would have been impossible to live as she did in any other country. Waldberg, however, was behind the times in most things, among others in its social under-estimation of wealth. A title combined with money was so much the better, but shekels without birth availed nothing in a society where it was possible to manage quite comfortably with a good old name and an income which would have been considered insufficient for the needs

of a bank-clerk's family in a suburban villa in England.

The Royal and influential friends of the Gräfin had assisted her in the education of her sons, but when they arrived at the proper age, they had, of course, to adopt careers suitable for the Grafs of Rühlheim-Hochburg. Naturally, they could not embrace any lucrative profession. The German aristocrat recoils in horror from the idea of money-making: business is for the middle class, and he would not soil his fingers or contaminate his ancient name by any association with commerce. Though, considering her birth and up-bringing, the Gräfin was exceptionally broad-minded, and devoid of many of the prejudices of her class, it would never have occurred to her to swerve from the family and national traditions in regard to her sons; therefore Ulrich, as the elder, was destined for the Army. Ernst she hoped eventually to squeeze into the Diplomatic Service.

As nothing but the best was good enough for them, Uli joined a *Garde* regiment stationed in his native town, and Ernst became a student in a crack Corps. At this time the Gräfin spoke most seriously to her two sons. She gave each of them an allowance, ludicrously small according to English ideas, but liberal considering her own income, and impressed upon them that with this her pecuniary responsibility towards them ceased. 'You must realise,' she said, 'that if you make debts, you make them at your own risk. I cannot pay them for you. I know that in a crack regiment and corps you will have to practise the most severe economy, but you preferred this alternative

to a Line regiment in a little garrison, and to studying as a private student.'

They had kissed their mother's hand, and had assured her that they would manage perfectly, especially as they lived at home, and thus saved the expense of board and lodging. Uli had kept his word, and by careful manipulation had succeeded not only in remaining free from debt, but in putting by enough to purchase a camera which his mother coveted, and which he had presented to her with much pride on Christmas Eve.

Ernst, on the contrary, was lazy, careless, and self-indulgent. He never denied himself a passing whim, or did without anything which he saw others possess. His was not a generous nature, but he liked the position which the spending of money gave him among his fellow-students; and though he expressed a contempt for money, the contempt was in reality for those who did not possess it. His bills had mounted up alarmingly, and the press for payment had come with a rush. He had already committed himself seriously to a money-lender, who had advanced him sums at extravagant interest, on the strength of his title and his mother's position at Court. A letter had now come, saying that the settlement of this loan was requested, and he had not the vaguest idea how he could raise even a hundred marks. The thought of telling the Gräfin was obnoxious, especially as he was doubtful as to the extent of the help she could or would give him, and to apply to Uli would he knew be useless. No; he must extricate himself from this mess without

the knowledge or assistance of his family, though how this could be managed he had no notion. His head ached, and he thought bitterly how unfortunate and badly-used he was.

These heroic reflections were interrupted by a knock at the door, and upon his surly 'Come in,' Marie, the maidservant, appeared. Karl, who had experience of the young Graf's temper after a drinking-bout, kept out of his way as much as possible, and had delegated Marie, who had more moral courage, to undertake his duties.

'What do you want?' Ernst growled, turning his face to the wall. Unshaved and blear-eyed, it was not a pleasant sight.

'The Frau Gräfin wishes to speak to the Herr Graf as soon as he is up,' Marie said, opening the shutters and letting in a flood of sunlight. 'The Frau Gräfin is in the study with the Herr Leutnant, who has just returned from parade.'

'Tell the Frau Gräfin I will be with her soon,' Ernst replied testily; 'and in God's name, clear out, and get me some fresh breakfast, though Heaven knows whether I shall be able to touch it!'

The Gräfin was sitting at her writing-table with a perplexed expression on her usually serene face, and Uli was standing near the window, flicking his riding-boots with his whip, when Ernst slouched into the room. A douche of cold water and a shave had promoted him to a semblance of decency, but he still looked haggard and pale.

'Good morning, Ernst,' the Gräfin said. 'It is about the party on Friday that I want to speak to you.'

'You don't usually consult me about your social functions,' Ernst said ungraciously.

'No; but I do want to consult you now. It is about the Rosenbaums. I want to know what you and Uli think on the subject.'

Ernst raised his eyebrows superciliously.

'You surely don't intend to invite them?' he inquired.

'Well, no—that is, I should like to,' the Gräfin said doubtfully. 'You see, I am to some extent indebted to Frau Rosenbaum. She bought up ten dozen copies of my Fairy Tale in Verse, which I had published at my own expense, and which would otherwise have been a considerable loss to me. Besides, you remember, Uli and I spent three weeks with them at their lovely Homburg villa. I want to do something in return. And I think Frau Rosenbaum is a very nice woman.'

'Of course if you and Uli care to put yourselves under an obligation to Jews—common Jewish tradespeople—invite them by all manner of means; but you will find other people won't come if you do.'

'I am afraid that is so,' Uli said, breaking into the conversation for the first time. 'I believe both the Grafs Radwitz said they didn't care to go where they would meet the Rosenbaums, and it came to my ears that old Excellenz von Hauken declared if she saw "those Jews" she would walk straight out of the house.'

'I consider it extremely rude of them all!' the Gräfin exclaimed with considerable heat. 'Besides, Frau Rosenbaum isn't a Jewess. Her

parents were American citizens, and she is an extremely nice woman, with great taste and a genuine love of poetry. I assure you there were tears in her eyes when I had read her my poem on the death of our beloved William the Great. She begged me to compose one on the assassination of their revered President, McKinley. She said thousands of copies would be sold in America.'

'My dear mamma,' Ernst interrupted impatiently. 'She may have great taste and she may be American, but you can't blink the fact that old Rosenbaum is a dirty little Jew, who made his money in old clo', or God knows what disreputable business, and you have only got to look at their fair daughter Edith to see her origin stamped all over her face.'

'Why are we so horribly narrow-minded in Waldberg?' the Gräfin sighed. 'Frau Rosenbaum was telling me that in England they have a Prime Minister married to a Jewess, and the Rothschilds are the most important persons in the country. She says the Jews rule society, and every one runs after them there.'

'Then why on earth doesn't the family Rosenbaum take up their abode in England, where they will be properly appreciated?' Ernst inquired sarcastically.

'Because Frau Rosenbaum has absolutely set her heart on getting into society here and having herself and her daughter recognised.'

'And I suppose you, mamma, have promised to help her?' Ernst said.

The Gräfin looked a trifle embarrassed.

'Well, I did say I would do all in my power. I like the woman, and it struck me as being so tragic that the one thing she desires with such passion is just the thing her money can't buy her.'

'I suppose she has plenty of shekels?' Ernst inquired with more interest than he had shown before in the conversation.

'They are enormously wealthy,' his mother remarked absently. 'She has enough money in her own right to buy up the whole of Waldberg society, but it seems it can't be bought.'

A thought had sprung up in Ernst's brain. He knew his mother's nature—which was altogether simple and honourable—far too well to suppose that she had been bribed in any way to support Frau Rosenbaum. The purchase of the ten dozen copies of her poem, a few pleasant weeks at Homburg, and a great deal of appreciation of her poetical effusions, constituted the remuneration which the Gräfin had received for her championship of Frau Rosenbaum. But why should not he turn these common, wealthy aliens to better account?

'Look here, mamma,' he said with animation; 'you can't offend these people, as you and Uli are under an obligation to them. You equally can't fly in the face of the whole of Waldberg Society. We must think of some course between the two.'

He gazed reflectively at the tips of his magenta boots, and then, as if on a sudden inspiration, exclaimed:

'I have it! Frau Rosenbaum will be deeply

offended when she hears you are giving a big "At Home" on Friday, and that she and her daughter have not been invited. I will go and call on her myself at once, this morning—put the whole case to her and explain frankly how we are situated. You say she is an intelligent woman, so she will understand when I tell her that this sort of thing can't be rushed. She can't force Waldberg society to accept her and her daughter, but I shall point out to her that with a little judicious waiting, sufficient outlay of money in charities, and the help we are anxious to give her, she ought in time to succeed. As a sop we can ask them one evening when we are alone. The English Mees won't mind.'

'That is a good idea,' the Gräfin said gratefully. She admired and loved Uli for his handsome looks, his gentle manners, and his affection for herself, but she knew that it was almost impossible to get an opinion out of him, and she was glad of Ernst's initiative.

'Go and call on Frau Rosenbaum—I know you can explain matters tactfully.'

She rose to leave the room, and looked attentively at Ernst's dissipated face.

'You are pale, my son,' she remarked gravely: 'I suppose you were sitting up half the night at your *Bierkneipe*. If you do that, how can you expect to be able to work in the morning?'

'Who ever does work during his first years?' Ernst exclaimed petulantly. 'One must *bummel*, and see life a bit before one settles down and becomes a *Philister*. Don't you worry. I shall

swot for my last six months, and come out at the head of them all.'

The Gräfin looked at him rather sadly. Revolutionary as the sentiment was, it crossed her mind that the privilege of belonging to a crack Corps might be paid for too heavily.

CHAPTER III

AT twelve o'clock, the correct calling-time in Germany, Ernst stood before the ornate front door of the Rosenbaums' mansion in the Kampf-strasse. It was the best street in Waldberg, broad and shady, and on both sides were fine stone houses, each standing in its carefully kept, carpet-bedded garden. The Rosenbaums' was the largest and most imposing of them all; and in carrying out Jacob Rosenbaum's wish that it should be on a more costly scale than any of the neighbouring houses, the architect had overloaded it with stone carvings and statuettes in niches, until there was not a plain space on which the eye could rest.

Ernst rang the bell, and immediately a solemn footman, in an entirely unsuitable livery, opened the door and disappeared with Ernst's card, leaving the visitor to wait on the doorstep until it had been decided whether he should be received or not. After a short space the footman reappeared, and, announcing that *Die gnädige Frau lässt bitten*, led the way up the broad, thickly-carpeted staircase. As he flung open the double doors, his face expressed a haughty contempt for his employers. In fact, it is practically impossible for Jewish families in Germany to obtain Christian servants, and it was only by the pay-

ment of exorbitant wages that Frau Rosenbaum had procured her two large un-Semitic lackeys, of whom she was equally proud and terrified.

Ernst found himself in a vast and gorgeous apartment. The long windows were draped with brocade curtains of deep cardinal red, looped up with silken cords; and through half-drawn portières of the same texture he could see another vast apartment stretching away into the distance. The carpet was thick and soft, and splotched with garlands of pink roses, and the furniture had spindle gilt legs, which looked unequal to the weight of the brocade cushions. The windows were tightly closed, and from the whole room emanated a feeling of uninhabited cheerlessness and expensive discomfort.

Frau Rosenbaum, through whom a tremor of pleasurable excitement had passed on reading Ernst's name, rang for her maid, and hurriedly changed into a becoming morning gown, which had just arrived from Paris. Rustling down the staircase, she pushed the portières aside, and advanced to meet her visitor.

'Ah, Herr Graf, this is an unexpected pleasure,' she exclaimed, holding out her hand.

Ernst clicked his heels together, bowed profoundly, and kissed the outstretched hand. It was small and white and covered with glittering rings.

Ella Rosenbaum was certainly not Semitic in appearance. She had small, regular features, good teeth and eyes, but a bad complexion which she was not wise enough to leave alone. Her hair was beautifully dressed by her French maid,

and her figure, which was inclined to plumpness, was restrained and shaped by her corsetière, and was invariably clothed in the latest of French fashions. She had done justice to the appliances of wealth for the preservation of youth; and Ernst, who was accustomed to the shapeless dowdiness of the elder women of his class, was pleasurably surprised.

'I have given myself the pleasure of calling on the gnädige Frau,' he said; 'my excuse is a message from my mother.'

Ella Rosenbaum tried not to appear too gratified. 'You must come into my boudoir, Graf,' she declared in her high nasal voice: 'it is more cosy than this, and we can talk comfortably there.'

Without waiting for his reply, she led the way to a comparatively small room at the end of the house. It was cheerful and sunny, with an open fireplace, in which, despite the season, a small wood fire was burning; but the whole place was so overloaded with bric-à-brac and photographs, that every movement seemed fraught with danger. A large white bearskin was on the floor, and a divan, piled with cushions, and several lounge chairs, gave an air of comfort to the room. Frau Rosenbaum motioned Ernst to one, and flung herself on to the divan, displaying a small, well-shod foot, and an edge of delicate lace petticoat.

Ernst sank into the deep armchair with a feeling of unwonted luxury. He was accustomed to the hard, straight-backed chairs which were the only seats provided in his mother's house, and in the houses of her friends. Lolling and lounging would have been sternly disapproved of in his

circle, had there been any opportunity of indulging in them.

'I have not had the pleasure of meeting you before, Herr Graf,' Frau Rosenbaum remarked, leaning her chin on her hand and displaying a round white arm amid the froth of lace on her sleeve. 'Of course I am great friends with the Frau Gräfin and your brother, the Herr Graf Uli.'

Ernst bowed. He was secretly enraged that she should claim friendship with his mother and brother, but she continued gushingly:

'We must make up for that now by your coming often to see me. I cannot get used to the stiff, ceremonious customs of this country. You see I am a genuine American, and if I like people I just tell them so.'

She spoke with a Yankee twang, which she accentuated as much as possible, and affected broken German with a frequent use of English words, though she could talk the language perfectly: it was, in fact, her mother tongue. Born at St. Louis, of parents who had early realised that there was little chance for the German Jew in Germany, she had made the mistake of ignoring this fact; and when Jacob Rosenbaum, captured by her un-oriental beauty, had begged her to return to Germany as his wife, she had consented to do so. They had moved about from one German town to another, she, filled with the desire to shine in society, he, filled with the desire to make more money. He had succeeded while she had failed. The entrées she coveted were denied to her, and those she could have had, she despised. At last Rosenbaum informed her that

he had selected Waldberg for the place of their permanent residence. With the unerring Semitic instinct, which the oppression of generations has taught to find opportunity in the weakness of others, Rosenbaum apprehended the opening that such a town would afford him. In Waldberg trade was primitive, the methods of commerce antiquated, and financial speculation unknown. Whether it would make a pleasant home for his wife or not, concerned him little. He gave her as much money as she liked, and she was at liberty to spend it in the way she liked. The aristocrats whom she venerated and pursued he silently despised, for he knew he could get the better of them, and he only admired the man who was sharper than himself.

It was thus that Ella Rosenbaum found herself in Waldberg, a stronghold of German prejudice and aristocratic exclusiveness, but a stronghold which she hoped to enter through the hospitable doors of the Gräfin Rühlheim-Hochburg. She wished to impress upon every one that she was not a German, but an American, who had been forced into an unhappy *mésalliance* with Jacob Rosenbaum; and as her parents had prudently changed their name from 'Levy' to 'Lorry,' she trusted that her origin would never be discovered.

Ernst turned his sky-blue cap in his hand, and for once in his life appeared at a loss what to say. The two objects of his visit seemed so difficult of manipulation now that he was actually confronted with Frau Rosenbaum, and he was so afraid of the venture miscarrying, that he hesitated to broach the subject. His companion, however,

filled up all pauses in the conversation. She was delighted at the thought of a tête-à-tête with a Graf, and in order to prolong it, rattled on incessantly, deferring to him in the most flattering manner, and supplementing the flattery with her bright eyes. She possessed the American Republican's love of titles combined with a servile respect for power inherited from her Semitic forefathers, which resulted in a cosmopolitan blend of vulgarity.

The little ormolu clock on the mantelpiece struck the half-hour, and Ernst felt he must go without having accomplished his mission. Frau Rosenbaum, however, jumped up protesting.

'No, no,' she exclaimed. 'You *must* stop and have lunch with me. I am quite alone to-day.' And she rang the bell without waiting to hear Ernst's expostulations.

At the appearance of the scornful lackey, she said very slowly, and as if each word possessed a pleasant flavour:

'The Herr Graf von Rühlheim-Hochburg is lunching with me. See that lunch is served immediately'; and her glance said plainly: 'You see, you stuck-up Christian flunkey, I have Counts to feed with me, though I am a Jewess and you take my money and despise me.'

'Your mother, the Frau Gräfin, will not wait for you?' she asked, turning to Ernst.

'Oh no,' he replied, thinking that he would get a far better meal and more appreciation than from his family and the English Mees, besides extending the opportunity necessary for the furtherance of his plans.

He was not disappointed in his anticipations. When Frau Rosenbaum led the way to the dining-room, he beheld a table glittering with silver, and decorated with rare orchids in slender Venetian glasses. The sideboard was loaded with cold delicacies of every description, and in a bucket of ice reposed a bottle of *Veuve Clicquot.*

'We will wait upon ourselves,' Frau Rosenbaum declared, conscious that she was not at her best with the cold, disapproving eyes of her lackeys upon her.

They disappeared silently behind the folding doors, and she and Ernst were left alone.

'You must do the waiting, Herr Graf,' she commanded playfully; and he, nothing loth, helped her to plovers' eggs and quails in aspic, at the same time shovelling a plentiful quantity on to his own plate.

She, meanwhile, had deftly uncorked the bottle, and filled the long-stemmed glasses to the brim.

'*Prosit*, Herr Graf,' she said, raising her glass and eyeing him archly.

'*Prosit*, gnädigste Frau,' Ernst responded, swallowing a mouthful of quail, and a glassful of champagne after it.

She refilled his glass each time that it was emptied—which was fairly often—and between them the first bottle was soon at an end, and a second one had taken its place in the ice bucket.

By this time they were both very gay. His tongue was unloosened, and she encouraged him to talk, laughing at all his jokes, though most of them were poor, and some of them were coarse.

'She is really a charming woman,' he thought;

'and one hasn't to be so infernally careful as one must with the ladies of one's own class. To your special health, meine Gnädigste,' he added aloud, and he drained his glass, smacking his lips appreciatively.

Ella Rosenbaum leant forward for a box of cigarettes. She insisted upon lighting one for Ernst, and then lighted her own from it.

They both lay back luxuriously in their chairs, and there was silence for a moment. Ernst had suddenly grown sentimental and melancholy.

'After all, it is a miserable life,' he exclaimed.

'Surely, Graf, you are the most enviable person?' Frau Rosenbaum cried, holding her cigarette between her over-ringed fingers. 'You have everything one could possibly desire — a great name, a title, position, good looks, brilliance and charm. I cannot imagine what more you could possibly want.'

'Ah! that shows how deceptive appearances may be,' Ernst replied, attempting to speak moodily, but secretly flattered at Frau Rosenbaum's description of himself; 'the fact is, I am worried, worried to death.' He glared gloomily at the opposite wall, and wondered how much he could decently ask her for.

'But, my dear Graf,' she exclaimed, 'you must tell me all about it; perhaps I can help you.'

'No, no; I am past help,' he said tragically.

'But tell me,' she insisted. 'You know I should consider it a privilege to be of any assistance to you, if it were in my power.'

'Well, if you must have it, and I cannot withhold my confidence from you, I am in debt,

horribly in debt; and as I can't pay my creditors, and my mother could not, and would not, do so for me, there is nothing left but to put a bullet through my brain.' He fell back in his chair, as if his life-blood were already ebbing away, but did not fail to note, out of the corner of his eye, the flush of pleasure which had spread over his companion's face.

'Why, if it is only that, dear Graf,' she exclaimed, stretching her hand across the table, 'it is not worth another moment's thought. I have as much money as I can possibly want, and can do with it whatever I like. I should like best to help you, and you have only got to mention the sum you need. *Don't* refuse me, please. Let us shake hands upon it and consider it settled.'

She held out her hand to him. Ernst raised it reverently to his lips and imprinted a fervent kiss upon the white fingers before he replied. Frau Rosenbaum thought she detected a tear in his eye.

'Angel!' he exclaimed, as if the word had involuntarily escaped his lips. 'But I do not see how I can accept the saving hand. I do not know when I should be in a position to repay this debt, and if my mother knew I had borrowed from you, she would never speak to you again.'

'Don't let these considerations worry you,' she replied, rising from the table. 'The payment can stand over indefinitely, and you may rely upon my absolute silence and discretion.'

As he followed her back into the boudoir, he noticed that she walked rather unsteadily; but she held her head high, and he liked the rustle of

her silk petticoats over the carpet, and the faint odour of violets that came from her clothes when she moved.

She seated herself at the little, useless-looking escritoire, and he stood by the mantelpiece, feeling ill at ease, notwithstanding the attainment of his object.

'How much?' she inquired, taking a small key from an enamel bangle on her wrist, and fitting it into a drawer.

Ernst felt the blood rush to his face. Having succeeded so admirably, he was, for the first time, ashamed of himself; but it was too late to draw back, and after all it was his last chance. He hesitated and stammered, 'No, really, meine Gnädigste, I can't, I simply can't accept it.'

'Nonsense!' she replied curtly. 'What is the amount you require? Seven—eight thousand marks? Or perhaps more?'

'Oh no!' he exclaimed, taken aback by her wealth and her generosity; 'if I had only six thousand marks I could clear off all my debts, and that damned money-lender—' he was going to say 'Jew,' but remembered and pulled up short.

'If it is only that, I believe I have the amount here,' and Frau Rosenbaum took out a leather case and counted over the notes. 'Here are six thousand marks,' she said, handing them to Ernst. 'I had this money in my writing-table, as I intended paying my dressmaker's bill. Take it, and may it help you out of your troubles.'

Ernst fell on his knees at Frau Rosenbaum's feet, and kissed both her hands.

'How can I ever thank you enough?' he cried, and then, conscious of a rather absurd anti-climax, he got up and seated himself in the armchair. Now that he had obtained what he wanted, he would have liked to go, but the other half of his mission was still unfulfilled.

Frau Rosenbaum broke in upon his reflections. 'I know you would always be my friend,' she said. 'You are doubtless aware how anxious I am to—to—get to know people here. Your mother, the Frau Gräfin, is *most* kind, and if only I had *you* to help me too, I ought to succeed.'

'You may be assured that everything in my power I will do, meine Gnädigste. You can imagine that after the splendid help you have given me, it will be the object of my life to show my gratitude. But this is a matter which needs the greatest care, and one *faux pas* might ruin all your chances.'

Frau Rosenbaum looked at him anxiously. 'Is it as bad as all that?' she inquired. 'I can give entertainments—I had thought of one when each guest should receive a valuable present—and dinners such as have not been dreamt of in Waldberg.'

'Yes, yes,' Ernst interrupted impatiently, 'but you won't get the people you want to come to them. It is no good blinking the fact that they don't want to know you, and they resent any attempt at being forced. Forgive my speaking plainly,' he continued, seeing the cloud on Ella's face; 'but we are allies in this campaign, and must be absolutely frank with one another. In

most countries, I believe, it is only a question of enough money to enter the inner social circle. But no amount of money, if it is money alone, will buy Waldberg society.'

'That makes me want it the more,' Frau Ella declared. 'Surely your mother, the Gräfin Rühlheim-Hochburg, with her position at Court and in society, could make the others take me up?'

'No, not even my mother can do that,' Ernst replied gravely, 'though she is most anxious to do so. To show you that this is the case, I will tell you what has happened. She is giving a party on Friday, to which she wished to invite you and your daughter, and you can imagine how much my brother and I desired it also. It was intimated to us, however, that if certain persons were invited, others would reluctantly be obliged to remain away.'

Frau Rosenbaum turned white with anger, and sprang from the divan.

'How disgraceful! how mean!' she cried passionately. 'As if I were not as good as they! As if I should contaminate them, narrow-minded paupers!' She forgot in her rage that she was abusing the class to which her guest belonged.

Ernst waited coolly until her anger had subsided, and then said:

'You are quite right, dear lady, they *are* narrow-minded, and they *are* ridiculous, but as you want, at all costs, to know these narrow-minded, ridiculous people, we must think of the best way of attaining this object.'

'What *is* the best way?' Ella inquired, leaning back on the divan.

'You must follow my advice, and do what I suggest. Don't attempt to force anything this season—that would be fatal. Just sit quiet and wait until the feeling against you has been forgotten. If any bazaars or charity entertainments are organised by any of our Royal Highnesses, step forward, spend money lavishly, and take a prominent part. This will please the highest in the land and bring you into touch with society. Meanwhile you may rest assured that I shall be working in your interests, and doing everything in my power to assist you.'

He rose to go, and Ella Rosenbaum, who was bitterly disappointed at the thought of her indefinitely postponed social campaign, had perforce to be satisfied with the Graf's assurances of ultimate success.

'*Auf wiedersehen,* gnädigste Frau,' he murmured, bending over her hand; 'and again my most heartfelt thanks.'

As the lackey conducted the Graf down the stairs, he cast him a reproachful glance, as if to say, 'How could a Graf Rühlheim-Hochburg demean himself by entering this house?'

CHAPTER IV

SINCE early morning there had been an unusual stir in the Gräfin's establishment. After Uli had gone off to the barracks and Ernst to his *Corpshaus*—Friday was the day for duelling—the Gräfin, assisted by Marcia and the servants, started on the preparations for the afternoon's party. There were sandwiches to be made—round pieces of roll with slices of sausage between—and, another delicacy beloved of the Teuton, black spiced *Pumpernickel* cut thin, buttered, and spread with cheese. This took time, but Marcia was amused, and thought it far better fun than having the refreshments supplied by a caterer. All the rooms in the flat had communicating doors, which were thrown open on the occasion of a party; and the Gräfin's bedroom, situated between the study and the dining-room, was pressed into service as another reception-room. Her toilet appliances were secreted in a cupboard, the washstand swathed in a tablecloth, and the bed remained the only piece of furniture it was impossible to disguise. This, however, did not daunt the Gräfin's intrepid spirit; it was only another proof of the latitude allowed to the *Hochgeboren* in the Fatherland; for the German ordinarily regards a bedroom as a place never to be alluded to, and to be entered, even by its owner, with apology.

All the superfluous furniture, of which there was not a large quantity, was stored in Uli's room; the dining-room table was pushed into a corner, and rows of chairs were placed in front of the platform. By the time these preparations were completed, and the Gräfin and Marcia had hastily eaten a few sandwiches, it was getting late, and they had just time to dress before the guests began to arrive. In the Fatherland it is not considered correct to put in an appearance half an hour before the close of the entertainment, and a rigid punctuality is always observed.

As the first bell rang, the Gräfin appeared, attired in an exceedingly short white cashmere frock, with a blue ribbon round her waist, and cleaned white kid gloves on her hands. The smell of them was positively explosive, and Marcia could not help thinking what a pity it was that she should cover up her beautiful hands—hands which had been so much admired that sculptors had asked for the privilege of modelling them.

The Gräfin inspected Marcia's toilette critically: it was of peach-coloured crêpe de chine and emanated from Dover Street, but it apparently only passed muster, for she merely remarked that it would do, and turned to welcome the first guests.

Karl, in his best livery, flung open the door, and four or five officers of Uli's regiment, followed by Uli himself, bowed themselves into the room. As each in turn advanced to the Gräfin, clicked his spurred heels together, and kissed her benzine-saturated gloves, Marcia quite expected that his red face would ignite like the eyes of her hero, the Baron von Münchausen.

'Allow me to introduce you to the English Mees,' the Gräfin said; and the ceremonial of the heel-clicking and bowing was repeated, without the hand-kissing, which she, as an unmarried girl, was spared.

By this time the guests were arriving in a constant stream, and the Gräfin had to devote herself exclusively to receiving.

Uli, who would far rather have kept the room between himself and Marcia, was too good a host to leave her in the lurch; and though he was painfully conscious of the jokes he would afterwards have to endure, he stood by her side, and introduced the men after they had saluted his mother. Those whom he omitted came up and introduced themselves, bowing and shooting out their names at her like pistol-shots.

She was soon the centre of a crowd of young officers, who, she gathered, were trying to make themselves extremely agreeable.

'Of course gnädiges Fräulein plays lawn tennis?' Otto von Brösewick asked. 'All the English play magnificently.'

Marcia replied that she played, but not magnificently.

'Ah, that is gnädiges Fräulein's modesty. Gnädiges Fräulein must come and play on the barracks tennis court.' Von Brösewick was anxious to engage the English Mees in a game, as he considered that he played better than any of his companions. He also possessed a suit of white flannels, while all the other officers played in uniform.

'The Frau Gräfin must bring gnädiges Fräulein

to the Drag Hunt,' Graf Radwitz drawled. He had torn himself from 'la petite Jenny,' and was wondering if the English Mees had enough money to be worth his while. He and his brother were the tallest officers in Waldberg, where the men seemed to Marcia ridiculously undersized. They came from Berlin, and talked the so-called *Garde* German, which the crack regiments there affect, and which Marcia thought extremely ugly and very difficult to understand. Their opinion of themselves and of their own importance was shared by their fellow-officers: all the younger men followed their lead, even in the matter of shaving their hair so close that the pink skin of their heads showed through, exposing every crease and wrinkle.

'Of course gnädiges Fräulein rides,' the younger Graf Radwitz remarked languidly. He stroked his moustache to display his white hand, and the gold curb bracelet on his wrist.

Marcia laughed. 'I am tired of being asked what I can do,' she retorted. 'I shall now start asking *you* all questions.'

They seemed slightly taken aback at this sally, and then they all burst into fits of laughter, as if she had made the most witty remark.

'*Colossal!*' exclaimed Baron Hennig, the man with the gross mouth who had been Radwitz's companion at the Café on the day that Marcia arrived. 'Gnädiges Fräulein is smart. *Do* ask us questions. We will swear to tell the truth, and who could mind such a charming inquisitor! It is my turn first.' He gave her an admiring glance, and edged so close that the scent with

which his uniform was drenched quite oppressed her.

At this moment she heard her name, and saw the Gräfin hurrying across the room towards her.

'You must come and be introduced to the ladies,' the Gräfin said, and hustled Marcia into the adjoining room.

Seated on the sofa, looking as if they had swallowed pokers and the operation had impaired their tempers for life, were Excellenz von Hauken and Freifrau von Taeuber-Sauergut. Marcia made her curtsies dutifully, and they both scrutinised her from head to foot, with cold and disapproving eyes.

Excellenz von Hauken looked to Marcia like a large female butcher. She was dressed in a brown check coat and skirt, and a small round hat. She affected the masculine in her attire, and considered herself a 'companion' to her son, who was just leaving school, and carried on miscellaneous flirtations behind her back. Freifrau von Taeuber-Sauergut was a thin, faded little woman, with thin, faded clothes and a peevish expression. She might have been a pew-opener. They had both unmarried daughters, and regarded Marcia as an interloper, poaching on their preserves of eligible young men, who might be sufficiently demented to prefer her to their own daughters. After a weary round of curtsies to a row of dowagers, whose combined titles and imposing names would have stocked a library of the Family Herald, and whose clothes a British housekeeper would have disdained, Marcia was

told she might join the 'young people' in the dining-room.

She complied with alacrity, and found all the young officers and a handful of girls playing Blind Man's Buff, from which they evidently derived a vast amount of enjoyment. On Marcia's entry they all stopped, and Uli hastily introduced the youthful Countesses and Baronesses. They were nearly all in white, and their tasteless dresses were of an antiquated cut and style. None of them wore hats, and their hair, which in some cases was pretty, was dragged back from the forehead, and gathered into a bun at the back of their heads. Marcia thought they were all singularly alike in appearance and costume, and wondered how many of them were sisters. They eyed her with the same suspicion their mammas had displayed, instinctively scenting a formidable rival in this fashionably clad foreigner.

Meanwhile Karl had appeared, carrying a tray with glasses of beer for the men, and for the ladies cups of a pale yellow liquid glorified by the name of tea. He was followed by Marie, who carried the sandwiches, piled up miscellaneously with chocolate *éclairs*. Uli, who made a charming host, attentive and courteous, moved about, seeing that no one had been neglected, and stopping to speak a few deferential words to any old dowager or unattractive spinster sitting alone. On such occasions he showed at his best. His amiable qualities were brought into full play, and there was no opportunity for a conversation long enough to exhaust his capabilities. When his mother gave a party, Ernst usually managed to

absent himself. He knew that the youthful Countesses and Baronesses would not look at him when they had a crowd of officers to choose from, and he had no propensity for playing second fiddle.

In the Gräfin's bare little bedroom General von Solms, his uniform covered with medals, was conversing with one of the few civilians present, the Minister of Finance. A little way off, a huge woman, heavy and ponderous, with fair colourless hair piled on her head, and ridiculously juvenile attire, was talking to a minute officer with an eyeglass and a vacant face, who was trying vainly to edge away towards the door.

Gertrude von Reydorf had committed the unpardonable blunder of attaining the age of thirty-six without having succeeded in her attempts to catch a husband. A German girl who at twenty-three has not changed her name is already regarded with anxious suspicion. 'She must be careful, or she will be left.' If at twenty-eight she still remains unmarried, she is doomed, and must expect to find herself put upon the shelf. She is an *altes Mädchen*, and must not go to dances, where she would be out of place among the *Jugend*; for a German spinster of twenty-eight is considered to have left her youth behind her. The unfortunate creature is thus put out of the running, and finds it practically impossible to effect a belated conquest, and redeem herself from the everlasting reproach—the bitterest reproach a German woman knows—of having failed to run a man to earth. The 'old maid' is despised and ridiculed: she is the proof of her own failure,

and the failure of her education and upbringing, which have made matrimony the sole object to be attained. She must resign herself to a life of neglect, knitting, and gossip.

Unfortunately, Gertrude von Reydorf would not own herself beaten. She insisted on going to the entertainments frequented by the young girls of seventeen and the lieutenants of twenty, who barely concealed their contempt for her. She attired her portly form in girlish costumes, affected a playful manner, and pounded round at dances with the youngest and most insignificant men, who were left over from the scramble for partners.

A bell rang, and Uli requested the *Herrschaften* to collect in the dining-room. Every one knew what this meant, and wearily moved to the row of chairs, or grouped themselves round the doors. The Gräfin stepped on to the platform, and without any awkwardness or affectation recited one of her own 'poems.' It was a sentimental little thing, rather childish, but quite pretty and unpretentious, and the Gräfin had a good enunciation and a musical, expressive voice. When she had finished, there was a great clapping of hands, and cries of 'Bravo!' The young officers in the doorway were laughing at her sugary verses, but after all, she was the Gräfin von Rühlheim-Hochburg, and Otto von Brösewick, as he clapped loudly, said to Radwitz, 'You see if she doesn't begin all over again.' The Gräfin bowed, flattered and pleased at the applause. She was far too ingenuous to imagine that any of it was ironical, or that she was not giving her guests as much pleasure as she gave herself. She would have

been amazed and incredulous, had she been told that even those who did not jeer were bored by her performance.

'And now I want to give you a little account of my holiday in Italy,' she said in her clear, well-modulated voice.

Every one exchanged meaning glances. They knew each step of that journey, which had already been the subject of a 'humorous lecture,' illustrated by lantern slides, given by the Gräfin for a charitable purpose. It was also probable that every person in the room had been the journey himself; for though the German has only latterly taken to travelling, he has always managed to save enough marks to take him for a trip to Italy.

Nothing, however, was omitted by the Gräfin, from a poetic description of her first impressions of Venice to a detailed account of her room in the hotel. Meanwhile, photographs which she had taken herself were handed round to illustrate her account. As they were mostly out of focus and insufficiently developed, they did not convey much, and might have been taken anywhere. Each guest glanced at them perfunctorily and handed them on.

The girls spent the time in directing coquettish glances at the lieutenants, who occupied themselves with ogling them back, twisting their fine moustaches, and thinking how enamoured the poor little things must be. The mammas sat stolidly, making hasty mental calculations as to how much *dot* Lizzi or Minna must have if she managed to catch Graf Radwitz or Baron Hennig, and wondering how the sausage ends of last

night's supper could be served up for that evening's meal.

At last the Gräfin finished her account with a patriotic peroration, bowed, and retired from the platform amid sighs of relief and a loud buzz of applause.

The guests now began to take their leave, haunted by a fear lest some one might persuade the Gräfin to give another recitation. The rooms rapidly cleared, and there only remained a few of the younger officers, who stood talking to Marcia.

'It is settled, gnädiges Fräulein,' Otto von Brösewick said eagerly; 'you are coming to-morrow afternoon for tennis. The Countess Armgarde is coming too, so we can have some good games. If the Frau Gräfin is too occupied to come with you, I will be here at three o'clock to escort you to the tennis court.'

'But that surely would not do,' Marcia objected. She had been told something of German etiquette, and that it is considered highly improper for an unmarried girl and a young man to walk together unchaperoned.

'Oh yes, really it will be a splendid arrangement,' Otto assured her. 'Graf Radwitz always sees Countess Armgarde home. We have our tennis racquets, so it is all right.'

Marcia failed to comprehend why the presence of the racquets should confer an air of respectability, but determined to ask the Gräfin about it afterwards.

'Remember, gnädiges Fräulein, I am going to ride past on my new mare "Dark Beauty" at eight o'clock to-morrow morning,' the younger Graf

Radwitz said with great emphasis. 'I shall look up at these windows, and hope you will be there.'

Baron Hennig was the last to say 'Good-bye' to her. His companions had gone into the salon to take leave of the Gräfin, and he and Marcia were alone in the empty dining-room.

'*Auf wiedersehen*, mein gnädigstes Fräulein,' he murmured, bending over her hand. She was conscious of his thick lips pressing it, and dragged it hastily away.

'I do not play tennis,' he said, looking into her eyes, 'and I have not such a fine horse as Graf Radwitz; but I am your devoted admirer, and I hope we may have the opportunity of seeing a great deal of one another.'

He clicked his heels together, and bowed again.

'What a circus!' ejaculated Marcia, as the last guest disappeared.

CHAPTER V

'On Monday we must go for our *tournée* of calls,' the Gräfin announced to Marcia. She was sitting at her writing-table, making out a list of all the Court officials, the commanders of the different Waldberg regiments, and the chief families of the aristocracy.

'There are about a hundred and eighty,' she remarked, looking thoughtfully at the list.

'Why, that will take us years to do!' Marcia exclaimed in horror. 'Why must I call on all these crowds of people?'

'It will only take us a few hours,' the Gräfin replied. 'It is one of the things which have to be gone through, before you can be presented at Court and attend the balls.'

'How good it is of you to take all this trouble on my account,' Marcia said gratefully. 'It seems a shame to drag you to all these dances, which you can't possibly care for.'

'On the contrary,' the Gräfin replied, 'I should go in any case, and it will only give me an added interest to have a daughter to chaperon.' Indeed the Gräfin attended all the dances as sedulously as did her son Uli. The youthfulness of her mind and body was inexhaustible, and she never wearied of sitting through the longest ball. She was rarely to be found with the other dowagers,

who spent the time in gossiping and talking away their friends' characters; but she liked watching the dancers. An atmosphere of enjoyment was the most congenial to her, and she sat thinking of her own happy youth, and of the poem she was engaged upon.

'I hope you enjoyed your tennis this afternoon?' she said to Marcia, who appeared plunged in a brown study. 'I am sorry I could not come with you, but as Herr von Brösewick fetched you it did not matter.'

'Oh, the tennis was all right,' Marcia remarked indifferently. She had, as a matter of fact, been greatly disappointed in the play. None of the men, with the exception of von Brösewick, knew the elements of the game, and they appeared to regard it merely as an opportunity for flirtation.

'How did they play?' the Gräfin inquired kindly. Tennis did not interest her in the least, but she knew the English like best to talk of 'sport.'

'Oh, they all of them served from the middle of the court, and seemed to think that good play consists in sending a soft ball that can easily be returned. But as they played in uniform, except Herr von Brösewick, you couldn't expect them to do much in those stiff, hot clothes.'

'When I was young,' the Gräfin said, 'no officer possessed any civilian clothes at all. My dear husband, who had been a cadet and had worn uniform since he was ten years old, bought a suit of plain clothes when we travelled into Switzerland, where he studied French. I remember well his saying to me that it seemed

great waste of forty marks, and he did not even know how to put the things on.'

'How queer that seems!' Marcia remarked, conjuring up a vision of the late lamented Graf in his two-pound suit. 'And it also seems so queer,' she continued, 'that you may walk with a man if you are carrying a tennis racquet, and not without.'

'Yes, the young men are allowed to conduct the girls to and from the tennis court or the ice, but if you had not the racquet or the skates in your hand, it would be highly improper to walk with a gentleman.'

Though to her British mind this quibble seemed absolutely ridiculous, Marcia said no more, and the Gräfin immediately plunged into the intricacies of her second Fairy Tale in Verse.

. . . . . .

Punctually at eleven o'clock on Monday, a landau drawn by two bony brown horses drew up before the Gräfin's apartment. Notwithstanding her rigid notions on the subject of extravagance, this was apparently a case of *noblesse oblige*, and she considered that Marcia must make her formal entry into Waldberg society in a fitting manner. Karl, attired in his best livery, handed them in solemnly, as if it were the Gräfin's private equipage, and after referring to the list which he held in his hand, he jumped on to the box, gave the coachman his directions, and they rattled off down the street.

The conveyance, which was only let out for state occasions, such as weddings and funerals, was close and musty, but Marcia knew that the

Gräfin was not an advocate of fresh air, so she did not suggest opening a window.

'There is a carriage one can hire with india-rubber tyres,' the Gräfin remarked as they jolted over the stones, 'but as you have to pay double as much for it, and they always take off the tyres if the weather looks doubtful, I have never tried it.' She complacently smoothed the creases in her best black silk dress, which had been donned in honour of the occasion, and which looked rather incongruous with her bright flower-bedecked hat.

The carriage having stopped before a house in the Kampfstrasse, Karl came to the window, and received the Gräfin's large pasteboard and Marcia's card. These he handed in, and was back on the box, and the carriage was off again in an incredibly short space of time.

'I wonder if all the people will be out?' Marcia said hopefully, as they stopped before another house a little further down the street.

'We don't ask if they are or not,' the Gräfin replied; 'we just drive to the various houses, and Karl leaves our cards. Nobody receives when one goes round on a *tournée*.'

Marcia opened her eyes, and wondered why the Gräfin had taken the trouble to put on her best clothes if they were to remain buried in the depths of a closed cab. However, it simplified matters greatly, and she now understood how a hundred and eighty calls could be disposed of in a matter of hours. All the same, the programme palled considerably before the round had been accomplished. The Gräfin was not very talkative: she was in the throes of a poetical creation, and Marcia

realised what a sacrifice this morning's interruption had been.

'How many cards are there left?' she inquired, looking at her watch, which marked two o'clock.

'Only six now,' Marcia replied, examining one of the Gräfin's vast visiting-cards.

The nine-pointed Graf's coronet decorated one corner, while the long legend of the Gräfin's title and names was followed by the equally long title and names she had renounced upon her marriage. It looked most imposing:

GRÄFIN VON RÜHLHEIM-HOCHBURG
AUF HOCHBURG
GEB. FREIIN VON UND ZU WALDHAUSEN-NIERENSTEIN

but Marcia noticed that it was printed, and not engraved, upon common thick cardboard, and looked like a wine-merchant's circular.

'Why have you no address on your cards?' she asked.

'It is not necessary,' the Gräfin replied. 'If you are somebody, every one knows where you live, and if you are nobody, it does not matter.' She dived into a pocket in some mysterious undergarment, and produced a *bonbonnière*, which she offered to Marcia. It contained chocolate pastilles of an unappetising and mouldy appearance: on these they regaled themselves until the remaining six cards had been deposited at the six noble houses. The clocks were striking three when they returned tired and hungry to the Gräfin's flat.

Ernst, who had not been visible since the party,

made his appearance with a black silk, tight-fitting cap on his head, and a large black patch on his cheek. Despite his unprepossessing aspect, he seemed very pleased with himself, and in excellent spirits.

'As you see, I was duelling on Friday,' he announced proudly to Marcia. 'I had Rebner of the Frisians—you know those chaps with black caps—for my opponent. He is the best fencer in the town, but I gave him a reminder before he gave me these.'

'Why on earth did you let yourself be hacked about like that?' Marcia asked in horror. 'Did you and this man have a quarrel?'

'Oh dear no!' Ernst replied with a laugh. 'Some of us fight every Friday, and it is arranged beforehand who shall be the opponents. As to quarrelling, we always exchange photographs, and are the best friends. This time I have one or two nasty cuts on my head; that's why I have to wear the so-called *Abfuhrmütze*,' and he touched his cap. 'But the worst is this cut across my face, from my mouth to my ear. You could see all my teeth through the gash, and the doctor had to put in seventeen stitches.'

'It must have hurt horribly,' Marcia exclaimed.

'So it did,' he acquiesced complacently. 'But I nearly sliced off Rebner's nose for him. The worst of the thing is that I am supposed not to drink any beer until the wounds are healed.'

'But what is the good of it all?' Marcia cried. 'You disfigure yourself horribly and suffer awful pain, and I can't see what the object can be.'

'Mein gnädiges Fräulein,' Ernst began in a

sententious voice, 'these are in the first place no disfigurements. We carry these scars through life; they are a proof of our bravery, and show that we have been at a University, and are not common people. Duelling is a grand national institution. It proves the courage of the German man, for if you twitch an eyelash at the onslaught of the rapier, you are dishonoured for ever.'

'I should have thought the scars were more a proof of your opponent's skill and your inferiority,' Marcia observed.

'Ah, you think that because you are an English Mees and don't understand,' Ernst retorted, quite petulantly. 'But you must come to our *Corpshaus* and see everything there. You will then comprehend the charm and greatness of the German students' institutions—though perhaps, as you are English, you would not understand them either.'

He appeared genuinely put out, and Marcia, afraid that anger might cause his wounds to start bleeding, felt she must appease him.

'Indeed, I should like to come,' she said amiably. 'And are the blue, green, and gold which you have everywhere your corps colours?'

'Ah yes,' he replied, entirely mollified. 'This tie-pin, watch-chain, and bracelet with the shields of blue, green, and gold, were given me by my *Fuchs*. Each elder student has a *Fuchs*,' he explained, 'that is, a student who has joined later, and who is entirely under the power of his *Bursche*. He has to do all his jobs and run all his errands. Some men have several *Füchse*, if they are very popular. I am *Erster Chargierter* and have three.' He looked at Marcia to see if this statement had

raised him in her estimation, and then continued, 'These rings were given me by two of them.'

He held out his hand, of which he was exceedingly proud, for Marcia to admire it, and the rings; but she only glanced with disgust at the nail on his little finger, which was nearly two inches long, pointed, and polished until it shone as if steeped in butter.

'That is the latest fashion,' he remarked, observing the direction of her eyes, but not their expression. 'A Russian Prince who was in our corps had a finger-nail three and a half inches long.'

'I thought only the Chinese went in for fashions of that sort,' Marcia said; and then, afraid lest he should take offence again, added hurriedly: 'We are going to the opera this evening, but I suppose you will have to stay at home?'

'I never go to the opera,' Ernst replied. 'I hate wasting my time. Besides, I have an engagement.' He fingered a note in his pocket. It was redolent of violets, and contained two sentences: 'Do forgive unconventionality, my dear Graf, and come to see me this evening. I dine at 7.30, and shall be quite alone.—Yours, E. R.'

Ernst did not, therefore, form one of the party when at half-past five punctually the Gräfin and Marcia, accompanied by Uli, started for the Opera-house. A thin rain was falling, but the Gräfin had swathed her head in a shawl, and her costume—which consisted of a short black skirt and a check blouse—was hidden under an old ulster. In her hand she carried a green silk bag containing her opera-glasses and some sandwiches. Uli had encased his feet in goloshes, with slits

at the back for his spurs, and in his long pale-gray military overcoat he looked extremely handsome. They soon joined a stream of people going in the same direction, most of the women attired in a similar manner to the Gräfin, and all carrying small bags.

Before the Opera-house, a fine stone building facing an open square, a group of officers was standing. They scrutinised the people who streamed in at the doors, with a supercilious stare. Occasionally they dropped their eyeglasses, bowed and saluted. The recipient of this acknowledgment passed up the steps with a gratified look.

On the arrival of the Gräfin and Marcia, the officers saluted with fervour, and directed glances of admiration at the English Mees, which, they were convinced, must cause her heart to flutter. Uli joined the group of his comrades and was received with a fire of chaff, while the Gräfin led the way up the bare stone steps to the dress-circle.

'I am so glad we have seats here and not in the stalls,' Marcia remarked, as she helped the Gräfin to unwind her wrappings.

'We *can* only sit in the first circle,' the Gräfin replied, drawing on her cleaned gloves, on which the wear and tear of the party had left marks; 'everybody in society has seats here, which they retain always. Only shopkeepers sit below.'

When they had found their places, Marcia saw that they were surrounded on all sides by the people she had met at the party. Excellenz von Hauken was just behind, bulging over on to the adjoining seats and breathing heavily. Seated

next to her was the Countess Armgarde, whose gaze was directed so intensely into the body of the theatre that she was entirely oblivious to everything else. Marcia followed her eyes, and saw that the two first rows of the stalls were filled with officers. They stood with their backs to the stage, their opera-glasses levelled at the occupants of the dress-circle. Frequently one of them would lower his glass, whisper something to his neighbour, and then both glasses would be raised again. Each of the budding Countesses and Baronesses felt pleasurably convinced that she was being scrutinised and admired.

At the other end of the balcony Marcia noticed a girl, evidently young, but of that full, Oriental type which matures without an interval of adolescence. Instead of the blouse and skirt which appeared to be the theatre toilette of Waldberg, she wore an elaborate lace gown; large diamond drops sparkled in her ears, and a gemmed chain hung round her neck. By her side sat a pale, anxious little person. Judging from the contemptuous silence with which she was treated, she was evidently a paid companion.

The conductor climbed to his place, and raised his stick. Instantly the loud buzz of conversation ceased, the officers sat down, and the overture began amid an absolute silence.

For the next hour and more Marcia was unconscious of everything except the glorious music, which seemed to transform the dusty theatre into a temporary paradise. Next to her the Countess Armgarde tried to distinguish the outlines of Graf Radwitz's shaved head, and wondered anxiously

when he would ask for an interview with her father. Perhaps after all he was only flirting with her, and had no serious intentions. She was so worried at this thought that the music passed over her unheard, and she was only roused from her disquieting reflections by the close of the act.

Everybody left their places, for the atmosphere in the theatre was stifling, and the seats hard. The occupants of the dress-circle congregated in the passage, gossiping, and hastily trying to devour their sandwiches before the officers joined them from below. Excellenz von Hauken's servant had brought a large hamper, out of which cold fowl, sausage, and various other delicacies emerged. Marcia imagined that a supper-party in the passage had been provided for, but the Excellenz had not the slightest intention of sharing her supplies, and stolidly finished them all herself. Half a dozen of the younger officers soon appeared, and moved about from one group of ladies to another. The poor little Countess Armgarde was filled with anxiety lest Graf Radwitz might overlook her, and was so overjoyed when he came up and wished her good evening that she was too flustered to reply. Otto von Brösewick hoped the English Mees was satisfied with her first experience of the Waldberg Opera. He had once seen a performance of 'The Geisha' in German, and thought he knew all about the English stage.

'Do you always sit in those front seats?' Marcia inquired.

'Yes, they are reserved exclusively for the officers, and by paying a couple of marks a month

we are entitled to come to the theatre every evening.'

'I wonder where Uli can be?' the Gräfin said. 'He always comes to see me in the intervals.'

'I saw him in the *foyer*, as I passed,' von Brösewick replied.

The *foyer*, a large room running across the theatre on the first floor, was swarming with people struggling to obtain beer and sandwiches at the refreshment-bar. It was eschewed by the ladies of the nobility, but the rest of the theatre congregated there, some to eat, some to meet their friends and to be seen by their acquaintances. Uli was hurrying across this room to reach his mother on the other side of the dress-circle, when he heard his name, and turned to find himself confronted by the girl with the diamond earrings whom Marcia had noticed at the beginning of the evening.

'How do you do, Herr Graf,' she said. 'What do you think of the performance?'

Uli looked round helplessly. He was extremely averse from being dragged into a conversation with Edith Rosenbaum in the middle of the *foyer*, but his slow mind could devise no means of escape, and he was too polite to pass on without replying.

'Would you please conduct me to that little table near the window?' she continued. 'Fräulein Schmidt has gone to get me some refreshment.'

Uli had no option but to comply with this request, and when the weary companion appeared with two glasses of champagne, Edith Rosenbaum insisted on his sitting down at the table with her

and having one of the glasses of champagne, while she sipped the other. Fräulein Schmidt drifted away again to get something to eat, and Edith turned to Uli eagerly, fearful that at the first silence he would leave her. She babbled on so incessantly, and he was so helpless in her hands, that the signal-bell rang for the audience to take their seats before he had managed to extricate himself.

'*Auf wiedersehen*, Herr Graf,' she said, offering her hand with a tender glance. 'Papa is going to give me an automobile, and then you must come for rides with me.'

Uli saluted, and hurried off as quickly as he could. On the stairs he ran into Baron Hennig, who had been attempting vainly to soften the heart of the English Mees, and had been snubbed for his pains. 'I hope you enjoyed your flirtation with the charming Jewess,' he remarked unpleasantly. 'Are you going to annex the Hebrew shekels, and leave one of us the English sovereigns?'

In the next interval kind friends made a point of acquainting the Gräfin with her son's 'attentions' to Edith Rosenbaum in the *foyer*.

'My son was watching them,' Excellenz von Hauken assured her, 'and he noticed how *particularly* nice Uli was to the girl.'

'Uli is nice to everybody,' the Gräfin replied calmly; but she could not help wishing that he would be more discreet.

CHAPTER VI

In the front room of a small house in one of the modest side-streets of Waldberg a young woman sat sewing, while a fair-haired child, of about three or four years of age, played at her feet. The mother was small and pale, and in her simple attire looked like some little *modiste* or nursery-governess. Her one beauty was her bright auburn hair, which was piled in a shining crown on the top of her head. The cuckoo clock ticked loudly, a caged canary sang in the window over the pots of geranium, and the whole room bore the appearance of lower-class respectability.

At the sound of a key turning in the front door, the woman threw down her work and jumped up with a cry of pleasure. Graf Radwitz appeared on the threshold, and she ran to him, flinging her arms round his neck.

'My dearest Kurtchen!' she said, 'it is so nice to see you again. I have waited for you each day, and you never came. Fritzchen asks all the time for dear papa!'

Radwitz flung himself into a chair. '*Na, Kleine*,' he said; 'have you and Fritzchen really missed me as much as all that?

'What do you think?' she cried, perching herself on his knee, and stroking his moustache; 'you are my dear, dear Kurtchen, and the smartest, handsomest man in the regiment!'

'Well, well!' he said, in a tone implying that he could not deny such an obvious truth, but that all the same he was not averse from hearing it. 'You know how fond I am of my "Kleine Jenny," and we have been very happy all these years, haven't we?'

'Happy!' she repeated, 'it has been heavenly! Think of all the delightful times we have had together—how you come here after all the worries and fatigues of service and society, and how I prepare your favourite dishes, and you find your slippers by the stove, and an old coat to slip into out of your stiff uniform.'

'Yes, Jenny, you cook chocolate soup, and *Rehbraten* with jelly, better than any restaurant *chef*,' he replied with appreciation. 'And your punch! Nobody can brew punch like my Jenny.'

'Yes, yes,' she interrupted; 'when you come back half frozen in the winter after hours in the saddle, and you drink a steaming glass of my brew—and then, after supper, when I have put Fritzchen to bed, and we sit by the stove and talk.'

'You are a good listener, eh, Jenny?' the Graf said, stroking her bright hair.

'Ah, but you talk so beautifully!' she replied with animation. 'I just love to listen when you come here from the barracks, and everything has gone wrong; when the recruits have been too stupid for anything, and the Colonel faultfinding. I love you to unburden it all to me, and I know what a relief it is to you.'

'Yes,' the Graf responded gloomily; 'it does

one good to curse and damn the dirty brutes, and the whole infernal system of supervision, to a person who doesn't immediately cover up her ears if you don't use drawing-room language.'

'My poor old Kurtchen!' Jenny said tenderly; 'I know you have a lot of worries and unpleasantness in the Service.'

'I should think so,' the Graf grumbled. 'Things have come to such a pass that if you hit a dirty idiot of a recruit over the head because he has driven you to the verge of distraction with his blasted imbecility, all the Socialist papers cry out against you, and you are told that you mishandle and mortally injure the poor helpless soldiers under you. Ugh! I am sick of the whole thing.'

'But, Kurtchen,' Jenny said anxiously, 'what has happened to upset you to-day? Of course I know that it isn't all fun to be in the Service, but think what it really means to be an officer. You are the first in the land, everybody looks up to you, shops and restaurants fight for your patronage, and you turn the heads of all the girls you meet. Who would look at a civilian if an officer were there? Shall I ever forget the time when I saw you first? How handsome you looked in your uniform! and I thought how proud I should be if you ever cared for me.'

'Well, you see, Jenny, I did,' he replied condescendingly. 'And I have told you things which I have not told to anybody else.'

'You knew you could trust me,' she responded proudly. 'How you have made me laugh with your accounts of all the aristocratic girls you meet

in society. What silly, giggling little things they are, and how impossible it is to talk seriously to any of them! How it is always—"Does gnädiges Fräulein like the Opera?" "Oh yes, Herr Graf." "Does gnädiges Fräulein play tennis?" "A very little, Herr Graf."'

Jenny had jumped up from Radwitz's knee, and was enacting this dialogue, mimicking the affected, simpering replies which she imagined the aristocratic *ingénue* would give.

The Graf did not, as usual, greet this playful sally with a laugh, but a look of gloom had again spread over his face. At this moment the youthful Fritz, who was tired of playing alone, set up a dismal wail, and in a moment Jenny was on the floor, kissing and consoling him.

'Send the child out to Frau Bäuer,' Radwitz exclaimed impatiently; 'she will look after him for a bit. I have got something to speak to you about, and I don't want to be disturbed.'

She gave him a quick glance, instinctively scenting trouble, but she said nothing; and picking up the child, she hurried him quickly out of the room.

On her return she found the Graf standing at the window, and looking angrily at the canary, whose loud song appeared to irritate him.

'I wish that infernal little brute would stop screaming!' he said petulantly. 'One can hardly hear oneself speak.'

'Why, you gave it me yourself, Kurtchen,' she replied in an injured voice, 'and you always said it made the room so gay and homelike.'

'Never mind what I said,' he broke in testily, and then, turning to her, he exclaimed in an abrupt and almost brutal manner, 'It is finished, over, done with!'

'What is?' she cried, advancing a step towards him, her eyes dilated.

'Our life together,' he answered, obviously nerving himself for an unpleasant scene. 'You knew all along the time must come when we should have to part. It has come.'

'You are going to be married,' she cried with sudden certainty.

He nodded. 'I must. I am in debt. As you know, I gamble a good deal, and latterly it has all gone wrong. In fact, it is high time for me to marry and settle down, and have a home of my own.'

'A home!' she cried hotly. 'Hasn't this been a home to you? Haven't I been as faithful to you all these years as if I had been your lawful wife? Do you suppose any of these little geese, with all their titles and blue blood, will be half as good a wife to you as I have been? Silly, empty-headed little fools!'

'Be quiet,' Radwitz exclaimed angrily. 'Remember, please, that they are pure and innocent, that they know nothing of the seamy side of life, that they live in a different world from this.' He made a gesture including the whole room and Jenny. 'Also remember,' he continued sternly, 'that when I entered into this arrangement, I told you perfectly straight that I should ultimately marry, and that I expected no scenes or recriminations on your part. We have had

a pleasant time together; it is finished—and *basta*!'

To his surprise she did not weep, or show any violent sign of emotion. In fact, she was the more dignified figure of the two. He was slightly embarrassed and awkward, conscious that he was playing a not too noble rôle. It was distasteful to feel himself lowered in the eyes of Jenny, even though she was his cast-off mistress.

'Of course I shall make it my business to see that you and the child are provided for,' he said, twisting his moustache, and glancing hurriedly into the little mirror. The sight of his own appearance always assisted him to regain his self-confidence.

'Who is she?' Jenny inquired quietly.

'The Gräfin Armgarde von der Elbe. Nothing is settled yet. I haven't spoken to her or her father, but of course it will be all right. The Graf has plenty of money, and naturally he will settle all my debts, gambling and otherwise. Also, I shouldn't be surprised if he made a handsome allowance for you and Fritzchen.'

'Ah, Fritzchen!' Jenny exclaimed sadly; 'what will happen to the poor little one?'

'He will be all right,' Radwitz declared. 'You will have enough money to apprentice him after he has left school. And as for yourself, with the allowance which I am sure Graf von der Elbe will give you, you are certain to find some honest, sensible artisan, who will make an excellent husband.'

He looked at her to see how she would take this suggestion, but she sat quite still, with her

hands in her lap. This was what she had expected all these years, what happened in every case where young officers formed *liaisons* with girls of her class. She must be thankful it had lasted as long as it had.

Radwitz got up, and moved irresolutely to the door. 'Good-bye, Jenny,' he said. 'I shan't forget you or Fritzchen, but the wrench had to come.'

'Good-bye,' she replied, without moving or looking at him. 'And I hope you will be happy with your Countess.'

He shut the door hastily, and strode off down the street, anxious to put as much distance as possible between himself and the little house which had been his favourite refuge during the last five years. He felt singularly discontented and upset, though he had gained the desired end without scenes or reproaches. Jenny had received her *congé* more sensibly and with less emotion than he could have anticipated. He was, in fact, a little piqued that she had seemed so resigned, that she should have heard her fate without a tear or a prayer for reprieve. Of course he could not have listened to her, and a scene would have been unpleasant, but he considered it cold and unfeeling of her not to have wept or bemoaned her loss. After all, it was a devilish blow for the poor little thing to be deprived of such a lover as himself. She might find others, but never again such a handsome, aristocratic, and delightful one. He had spoilt her for anybody else, he felt pityingly, but then he had given her years of bliss, and she ought to be everlastingly grateful to him.

His sword clanked on the pavement as he walked along, and he noticed that all the girls stared after him with admiring eyes. His spirits rose, and he lost the sensation of discontent which he had felt on leaving Jenny's house. Stopping before a shop, he pretended to examine the goods in the window. In reality his eyes were fixed upon the mirror at the back, where he saw reflected, to his entire satisfaction, his own elegant figure in its tight-fitting blue uniform. Drawing from his pocket a small ivory brush, engraved with the nine-pointed coronet, he carefully brushed up his moustache, gave a last glance into the mirror, and passed on. By this time he had quite regained his normal good spirits and his usual pitying condescension for the rest of the world: Jenny and his interview with her had passed into temporary oblivion.

On reaching Café Heintz, he thought a glass of beer would be refreshing, and sat down at one of the tables on the pavement. Here he was joined by Otto von Brösewick, who came up to him with an unusual look of excitement on his mummified little face.

'Have you heard about von Reich?' he asked. 'He's got to exchange into another regiment!'

'The devil he has! Is it because of that ridiculous affair with the recruit?'

Von Brösewick nodded.

'What are the facts of the case?' the Graf asked. 'I didn't hear them.'

'It was an absurd bagatelle,' von Brösewick replied, crossing his legs, and admiring the ex-

cellent fit of his high riding-boots. 'Von Reich was drilling some of those infernal recruits in the barrack-yard—an even more uncivilised lot than usual, from somewhere in the wilds of Posen. They understood about as much of our language as a Hottentot. Von Reich commands, "Shoulder arms!" and one great clumsy lout of a peasant lifts his bayonet and points it straight at von Reich's head. Naturally, he didn't want his eyes gouged out by a damned recruit, so he drew his sword, and knocked the bayonet out of the fool's hand. In the excitement of the moment he also called him a filthy swine.'

'Well, if he had reported himself at once at headquarters, he would have been let off with a day's arrest, I should think,' the Graf remarked.

'Yes, but he was stupid enough not to do so. He thought it would blow over, and so it would have done if some peasants had not unfortunately been watching the whole thing from the gates. They immediately made a tremendous fuss, reported the affair, with their own vile additions, to some Socialist rag, and the whole crowd behaves as if a poor innocent soldier had been half killed by a brutal aristocrat.'

'What with these filthy Socialist papers which are only waiting to pounce on any case of discipline in the Army and call it maltreatment, and the still more filthy military novels, the Army soon won't be fit for us,' the Graf remarked bitterly.

'The *plebs* have been roused against our class latterly,' Brösewick said, 'because they are jealous

of our position, and know that we make Germany the great and all-powerful nation she is. But the military authorities feel now that it is best to soothe popular feeling, and von Reich is therefore to exchange into the Line until things blow over a bit.'

'It seems a disgrace that these low-class wretches should dictate to *us*,' the Graf remarked, knocking the ash off his cigarette with his ringed finger.

'Especially as I should like to know how many of *them* would work for nothing, as we do,' Otto responded. 'They shout at our social prestige and privileges, but do you suppose a single one would care to exchange these for the money they earn?'

The Graf looked surprised that the usually cool little Brösewick should show so much argumentative fervour. This was about the only subject outside his own affairs in which Radwitz felt interested: attacks on the Army or Nobility infuriated him.

'Look at the way they seize upon any case of immorality among the officers, or cruelty among the sergeants,' Brösewick continued. 'If the foreman in some works hits a workman over the head, who knows or cares? and if an accursed shopkeeper lives a life of vice, who would dream of abusing the whole of trade in consequence?'

'These vile military novels have done as much harm as anything,' the Graf reiterated; 'and the fact that they have been prohibited has caused the whole of Germany and every other country to read them.'

'When no one would otherwise have heard of them. The impudence,' Brösewick continued hotly, 'of a man writing about a battalion of the *Train*[1] in a miserable little frontier garrison, as if it were the whole German Army!'

The Graf's nostrils dilated. 'The *Train*!' he exclaimed contemptuously, as if the mere name were contamination. 'Our military ash-heap! Made up of *plebs*! and the best officers they can boast of are the aristocrats who have run off the lines, and have to choose between that and the sack.'

'If I had the choice, I shouldn't hesitate,' Brösewick remarked.

'Good Heavens, no!' the Graf exclaimed. 'If I thought I might ever be forced into the *Train*, I should put a bullet through my brain.'

'One might some day find oneself in an awkward hole,' Brösewick said thoughtfully. 'Supposing one got involved in some nasty scandal, or gambled all one's money away, there would be nothing left but the *Train* or the Colonies.'

'Heaven preserve us!' the Graf ejaculated fervently. At the mention of gambling his face had clouded over.

'There is always a rich marriage to help the lucky ones,' Brösewick remarked, buckling on his sword. 'I hear Graf von der Elbe will give his daughter a most handsome *dot*. Of course, she is rather boring, but then she is so beautifully innocent, and one can't have everything in this world.'

[1] The German equivalent of the Army Service Corps. Usually pronounced 'Trank.'

Graf Radwitz eyed him suspiciously, but before he had settled in his mind whether this remark was intended to be unpleasant or not, Brösewick, with an airy '*Auf wiedersehen*,' had disappeared down the street.

CHAPTER VII

'You must not forget that you drink tea to-day with Grete von Heller,' the Gräfin said to Marcia. They were sitting at breakfast, a meal which they usually had to themselves. Uli was always up and off to the barracks by six o'clock, and Ernst rarely appeared until late in the morning.

'It is a very good thing for you to get to know the young girls before the season begins,' the Gräfin continued, crumbling her roll into her coffee-cup. 'You might perhaps join their *Kranz*.'

'What is a *Kranz*?' Marcia inquired.

'A *Kranz* is a circle of young girls, who are all friends, and agree to meet once a week, in turn, at their different houses,' the Gräfin informed her.

'And what do they do when they meet?'

'They usually have some classical work, preferably a play, which they read aloud, each taking one or more parts. How well I remember my *Kranz* when I was a young girl!' The Gräfin loved reminiscences, which all seemed pleasant to her. 'I always took the big rôles. Goethe's "Tasso" was my great favourite. I would drape myself in a curtain, and declaim those glorious speeches with action.'

She got up, pushing back her chair from the

table, and Marcia, afraid that she was about to burst into one of the classic declamations she loved so dearly, hastily asked what else was done at a *Kranz*.

'We drank tea,' the Gräfin replied, 'and then we talked a little. The other girls were very fond of talking, but I always preferred the reading and recitations.'

'But perhaps these girls won't want me in their *Kranz*,' Marcia said doubtfully.

'Of course they will,' the Gräfin assured her; 'they are sweet, amiable young things. Grete von Heller is very intelligent, and she has a sister, Erika, who is extremely clever. She is no longer very young—she must be twenty-six—and is still unmarried. Some people, I hear, say she is too clever, but I don't think so, and I have always found her bright and pleasant. Then there is Armgarde von der Elbe, whom you know, I think. She is a sweet girl, perhaps a little quiet, but so domesticated and unspoilt. However, you will meet them all this afternoon. You will enjoy the reading, and it will be excellent practice for your German.'

Marcia was not quite sure that she would find the *Kranz* such a delectable entertainment, and she was even more doubtful of the reception which would be accorded her. Judging from the behaviour of the young Countesses and Baronesses at the Gräfin's party, they were hardly likely to receive her with open arms. But she did not wish to distress her hostess by suggesting this, and kept her opinion to herself.

For several days Karl had been busy answering

the bell, and receiving the harvest of cards which Marcia was now reaping in return for the hundred and eighty she had sown on the *tournée*. The Gräfin informed her that she had taken the social plunge and was 'received.' She would be 'received royally' later on, and she thought with pleasurable anticipation of the gorgeous functions which would follow.

The Gräfin was full of reminiscences of her first court ball. 'I still have the costume I wore,' she told Marcia; 'white silk and a wreath of pink roses. Perhaps I might get it out and wear it at the next party. It only needs a little ironing, and it will look quite fresh.'

'Will all those girls at the *Kranz* go to the court balls?' Marcia asked.

'Oh yes,' the Gräfin responded. 'They are all of the nobility. You won't find a single *bourgeoise* there. They don't mix.'

When Marcia was ushered into the Hellers' salon that afternoon, she found that she was the last to arrive. The noble young ladies were seated in a bunch at one end of the room, whispering and giggling, but the moment she appeared they ceased abruptly, and Grete von Heller rose to receive her. She fulfilled the duties of hostess, as on these occasions the parents and all the elders disappear, and leave the field clear for the *Jugend*.

'I think you know everybody,' Grete said, conducting Marcia into the circle. The girls rose, and bowed stiffly. Two, whom Marcia had remarked because they were the only others besides herself who wore hats, came up and asked to be introduced.

'Fräulein Erna von Holtz, Fräulein Sophie von Holtz,' Grete said, and they bowed and shook hands. The Holtzes were of newer nobility than the others, but they made up for this, to some extent, by possessing more money and newer clothes. They declared that all their things came from Paris, and were looked upon as anticipating the fashion. As a matter of fact, they got everything ready-made from a large emporium in Berlin, and managed notwithstanding to be two seasons ahead of the Waldberg fashion. To-day they were attired in tartan pleated skirts, and were conscious of the impression which their 'smartness' must make on the English Mees.

Every one sat down, but the conversation hung fire, and Marcia felt that she was the disturbing element. She looked round the room, which bore the strongest family likeness to the Gräfin's salon, except that the suite was upholstered in blue plush instead of maroon rep. Her attention then wandered to her companions. Nearly all of them were dressed in badly hung skirts and tasteless woollen blouses, which fitted ill on their heavy, square figures. Several of them wore rings and chains hung with charms—lucky pigs and hearts —which they had presented to one another.

'Do you like Germany?' Armgarde von der Elbe asked. She was good-natured, and did not want the English Mees to feel left out in the cold.

Marcia replied appropriately, but it was impossible to keep up a conversation, as Armgarde was trying hard to catch what the others were saying.

'I don't believe Baron Hennig would marry her.'

'But I hear he is frightfully in debt,' Sophie von Holtz declared. 'You know he backed Otto von Brösewick's horse "Silly Sally," and they both lost heavily.'

'Otto von Brösewick can afford to lose,' little Baroness Elsa von Dörring said. 'He is fearfully rich and luxurious. Imagine, Frau Müller in the leather-shop told me the other day that he had just bought a magnificent crocodile dressing-case, all fitted with crystal and ivory.'

'You don't suppose he bought that for himself?' Erna von Holtz giggled. 'Of course he might have, but I happen to know it was a *lady's* case, and the Müllers had got it over from England on purpose.'

'Who could Otto von Brösewick have bought it for?' some one asked eagerly. 'Surely not . . .' and then they put their heads together, and a whispered conversation ensued, which was interrupted by the announcement of tea.

They all trooped arm-in-arm into the adjoining room. A round table stood in the middle, covered with heaped-up plates, and lighted by a lamp suspended from the ceiling. There was a considerable amount of argument before every one was seated to her satisfaction. One of them could not be parted from 'her dear Elsa,' another must sit next to 'dearest Armgarde.' At last everything was arranged satisfactorily, and as they settled into their chairs, hasty but searching glances were thrown on to the plates.

'How mean!' Baroness Elsa whispered to Sophie von Holtz; 'Grete has bought the two-pfennig cakes instead of the five-pfennig ones.'

'And there are none of my favourite *Obsttörtchen*,' Sophie replied in disgust.

Here the door opened and Erika von Heller came in. She shook hands with Marcia, and took the empty chair next her. It struck Marcia that she certainly gave the impression of being 'not quite young,' though she was only twenty-six. There was nothing really youthful about her; her complexion was sallow, and she had that wearied, embittered expression of the eyes and mouth usually associated with the disappointed woman of fifty. Her figure was large and over-developed, her eyes fine and dark, with long lashes and a challenging expression; she had good teeth, and full, pale lips.

She turned to Marcia, and talked to her the whole time, ignoring the rest of the table. 'It is such a relief to see a fresh face, and to talk to some one who has interests outside Waldberg gossip,' she declared.

Meanwhile the refreshments were handed round: cups of pale, watery tea, with dabs of whipped cream floating on the top; caviare and sardine sandwiches, cream tartlets and sweet cakes, which Marcia found she was expected to take on to her plate all at the same time.

'How I should love to see England, and travel everywhere!' Erika von Heller exclaimed. 'You have no idea how tired and bored one gets with this place and our narrow society. I was sick of all the vapid young lieutenants before my first season was over, and as to the girls—I haven't one interest in common with them.' She was thankful to find some one to whom she could un-

burden herself, and she poured her complaints and grievances into Marcia's ear.

'Now tell us about Baron Hennig,' Sophie von Holtz cried, after assuring herself that the attention of the English Mees was entirely monopolised by Erika, and that they could talk unobserved.

'I heard from some one who has it firsthand from her maid, that he really is engaged privately to Marie Findler,' Grete announced.

'No, no, impossible!' the others cried. 'Why, she isn't *adelig*; she's a manufacturer's daughter. He couldn't possibly marry her.'

'She has heaps of money, and he has heaps of debts,' Grete remarked.

'But he wouldn't be able to remain in his regiment if he married her,' Sophie observed, anxiously watching the plate on which she detected one of her favourite cakes—it would be such bad luck if it were snapped up before her chance came. To her relief it was not taken, and after transferring it hastily to her own plate, she continued: 'Baron Hennig would not like to leave Waldberg and join some little infantry regiment in the provinces, which he would have to do if he married Marie Findler.'

'Perhaps he will exchange into the *Train*,' Hertha von Arnsperg jeered. Hennig had ignored her encouraging behaviour, and she hated him in consequence.

'He'd never do that,' Elsa declared with conviction. 'Nobody would know him then.'

'Gertrude von Reydorf has danced with a *Train* officer,' Erna von Holtz said: 'I saw it myself.

The other officers pretended they didn't see her, and when the *Train* came up she was thankful to take him.'

'I would rather have been a wallflower than dance with one of the *Train*,' Sophie cried. 'I don't believe Baron Hennig would ever dream of lowering himself so terribly. If he is forced to marry the Findler, he had better retire and settle in the country right away. He may find some little place where they won't inquire whether his wife was noble or not.'

'Why doesn't he marry one of his own class?' Hertha von Arnsperg inquired, taking alternate bites at a caviare sandwich and a cream puff. 'I dare say he might find somebody who would have him.'

'Of course he might, but so few of us have enough money,' Grete said regretfully. 'Armgarde is our only heiress, and she is *nicht zu haben*.'

Everybody laughed at this sally, and Armgarde blushed to the roots of her blonde hair. She had not taken part in the conversation, but sat hand in hand with Erna, for whom she *schwärmed*, listening eagerly to the discussion.

'Yes, the Graf is serious this time,' Elsa said; 'he is going to reform and settle down as a dutiful husband. When shall we have to congratulate you, Armgarde?'

The little Countess giggled nervously, and looked down at her plate. 'You mustn't tease me, dear Elsa,' she expostulated.

'We are not teasing,' Hertha von Arnsperg said in her hard, unpleasant voice; 'we are only thankful that another of those gay young lieu-

tenants has renounced his wicked ways, and has made up his mind to marry one of us.'

'I suppose Graf Radwitz has been very wicked?' Armgarde said in tones of awestruck admiration.

'Heavenlily wicked!' Grete declared. 'Of course, you all know about his *liaison*?'

'Of course! But do tell us all you know, Grete,' they begged, fearful of missing any spicy details.

'Well, I have heard that he has lived with this woman for years. She is exquisitely beautiful, and he dresses her in brocades and pearls like Scheherazade in the *Arabian Nights*. She never goes out, but lives in a little house in one of the back streets. It looks quite common and poor outside, but inside it is like a Turkish palace, with silken divans and Eastern hangings.'

'That is why he has such awful debts,' Sophie von Holtz exclaimed. 'All that must cost a terrible lot of money.'

Armgarde had listened with open eyes and mouth. How could she hope that her adored and mysterious ideal would be content with her poor little person, after living with a glorious, brilliant Scheherazade in a Turkish palace? Like all her companions, she regarded the sins of the young men as so many added attractions. A Don Juan was delightfully dangerous and 'smart.' A lieutenant with a reputation for virtue they despised, and thought dull and insipid.

'I don't believe a word about the brocades and pearls and the Turkish palace,' Erna von Holtz declared scornfully. She smuggled improper books

into her bedroom, and hid them under the mattress. Guy de Maupassant, she informed her companions, was her favourite author; but in reality she preferred the sensational and obscene productions perpetrated by certain German writers —mostly female—which she devoured in bed, with her door locked. 'I have heard that his mistress is a common woman, and that they have a large family,' she added.

'What will happen to her when he marries?' Elsa inquired.

'She will probably commit suicide, if she can't get another lover,' Erna said, helping herself to a cream puff.

'How awful!' they all cried with excitement; and Armgarde felt quite miserable at the poor creature's unhappy fate.

'Of course the Waldberg men are very steady,' Erna continued, munching her cream puff; 'in other places, and particularly in small garrisons, the things they do are too awful for words.'

'Have you read that improper book which has been forbidden?' Elsa asked eagerly. Erna nodded her head with pride.

'Oh, that's only about a horrid *Train* battalion in some little hole,' Hertha von Arnsperg declared scornfully. 'I heard Papa and General von Solms discussing it the other evening. They didn't know I was in the room, and I heard everything.'

'What did they say?' Grete asked.

'They said of course it was a filthy thing, but you couldn't judge the Army by the *Train*, where the officers were impossible and married whom

they liked, and of course they probably lived with each other's wives.'

'But what about Otto von Brösewick's love-affair?' Elsa von Dörring inquired. The vice of the officers of her acquaintance interested her infinitely more than the vice of the Army in general.

'His mistress is a married woman,' Erna von Holtz asserted. 'Only up till now nobody knows who she is.'

'Somebody should go round and find out which of the married ladies has a crocodile dressing-case with crystal and ivory fittings,' Hertha suggested.

'We don't even know that she is in society,' Erna said. 'It appears that Otto was seen at one of the races with a very smart woman, who looked like a "professional." Of course that may be another, but one never knows.'

'And I hear that Uli von Rühlheim is always about with Edith Rosenbaum, and that he will probably marry her,' Elsa informed them in a low voice.

There was a chorus of expostulation: 'That Jewess! Impossible!'

By this time they had all become so red-faced and heated from the combination of scandal and a superfluity of refreshments, that they pushed their chairs from the table, and fanned themselves vigorously with their handkerchiefs. Grete von Heller, suddenly recollecting her duty as hostess, pressed Marcia to take some of the remains of cakes and sandwiches. Having with difficulty consumed the contents of her piled-up plate,

Marcia was thankful when they got up from the table and returned to the salon.

It was after six o'clock: they had been sitting for more than two hours over the table, in an atmosphere of unwholesome edibles, whispered scandal-mongering, and bitter complaints.

The whole entertainment had wearied her horribly, and seeing that the noble young ladies had settled down for the continuation of their gossip, and that she would be forced again to listen to Erika von Heller's life-history, she made her *adieux* as quickly as possible.

Karl was waiting to conduct her home. As the front door shut she felt convinced that the youthful aristocrats had already torn herself, her reputation, and her clothes entirely to pieces, and she inwardly determined that her first should be her last *Kranz*.

'I hope you enjoyed yourself?' the Gräfin remarked at supper that evening.

'Oh yes,' Marcia replied evasively; 'but they did not read any classics.'

'Really?' the Gräfin replied. 'Perhaps things have changed since my time.'

Judging from her account of a *Kranz*, Marcia thought that they decidedly had.

CHAPTER VIII

ERNST had for some time shown himself comparatively little in the home circle. He was much taken up with corps 'duties,' and he often received little notes asking him to dine in the Kampfstrasse. These he usually accepted, for he liked the food and the flattery provided by Frau Ella. The secrecy of these entertainments also tickled his fancy: he thought it 'smart' to have tête-à-tête dinners with a married woman, even though she was a Jewess. He and Frau Rosenbaum had settled that these meetings should be strictly *sub rosa*, and that she should only invite him when she was alone and undisturbed. This she was very ready to do, for she was proud of her 'conquest' of Graf Ernst, and fearful that if her daughter appeared on the scene he might transfer his attentions.

One evening, however, when Uli had gone to the Opera and the Gräfin had invited Baroness Elsa to spend the evening with Marcia, Ernst brought three of his fellow-students to supper at his mother's house.

'You are coming with mamma to the corps *Kommers* next week,' he informed Marcia, 'and I want you to know some of the men beforehand.' He felt that his other occupations had prevented him from making proper progress with the English

Mees, but he was convinced that an evening of his society would rectify this.

Supper was at eight o'clock, but twenty minutes before the appointed time the bell rang, and Ernst ushered his three companions into the salon. Dom Manuel Carvalho de Montinho, a Portuguese count, was short, thickset, and swarthy: he looked over thirty and was probably eighteen. He wore evening-clothes, an elaborately frilled shirt, and lavender kid gloves. His black hair was plastered with brilliantine, and he was so saturated with scent that he smelt like an ambulating hairdresser's shop. Walther von Vogelschwink followed him: a youth with a scarred face, and the corpulent figure which results from protracted beer-drinking. Instead of evening-dress he wore a tail coat, loose check trousers, and a voluminous stock tie, above which a small rim of collar was visible. The third student called himself Eugène de Villeneuve, and said that he came of an old Huguenot family. In reality his name was Neustadt, and his mother, who was a banker's widow, lived at Hamburg. However, she gave him an allowance large enough to ensure the acceptance of himself and his title in the crack corps of the Suevians; and, as he could drink more beer than the others, was an excellent fencer, and had a beautiful curling moustache, he was extremely popular with both sexes. He had fought a duel the day before, and there was a wad of cotton-wool on his left cheek.

After the introductions had been effected, they all sat down in a circle, the men twisting their blue student caps in their gloved hands, and eyeing Marcia and Elsa von Dörring furtively. The

latter, who declared that she despised all civilians, and thought nobody but a lieutenant worth speaking to, was wondering which of the four she would flirt with; and Marcia, as she took in the details of their weird attire, understood why the German instinctively clings to his uniform.

'The English Mees is coming to the *Kommers*,' Ernst remarked to Walther von Vogelschwink, who was sitting on one side of Marcia.

'Oh, indeed!' Walther replied, beaming. He appeared in a chronic state of heat, and constantly dabbed his red face with a scented pocket-handkerchief. His susceptible heart had already succumbed to Marcia's charms. She was, he thought, lovely and ravishing, and he wondered if she would give him a souvenir of herself which he might always keep with him.

'On which side of the hall are the seats reserved for the Frau Gräfin's party?' he inquired.

'On the left side of the hall, the end box,' Ernst informed him.

Dom Manuel, who had been listening intently, and on whom Marcia, with her tall slim figure and fair complexion, had made a profound impression, burst into the conversation. He had a deep bass voice and spoke broken German, pronouncing all the *ch*'s hard like *k*'s. 'Then it shall be arranged that the Suevia table shall be at that end of the hall, and I shall sit so that I can look all the time at the gnädiges Fräulein,' he whispered hoarsely.

Here Karl opened the door, and Dom Manuel, without hesitating an instant, offered Marcia his arm and followed the Gräfin and Eugène de

Villeneuve into the dining-room. Walther, extremely crestfallen at being forestalled by the Portuguese, hurried after, and managed to secure the seat on the other side of Marcia, while Elsa, who had been carrying on a wordless flirtation with Ernst, was glad to find that he fell to her lot.

The only additions to the ordinary evening meal were an extra plate of ham and sausages and a *Mehlspeise*—a mould floating in a lake of horribly sweet raspberry sauce. Numerous bottles of red and white wine of the country stood on the table, for the Gräfin knew that considerably more was drunk when students were guests instead of officers.

'Which will gnädiges Fräulein take, red or white wine?' von Vogelschwink inquired. But Dom Manuel had already filled Marcia's glass, and was whispering unintelligible compliments in his queer German, and leaning his pomaded head so close to her that she moved her chair nearer to her other neighbour. Walther had tucked his napkin under his chin, and was devoting his attention to the contents of his plate. As Marcia turned to him, however, he laid his knife and fork down against the edge of his plate, hastily swallowed a lump of sausage, and looked at her with an amorous expression in his little round eyes.

'How I hope I shall sit somewhere where I can see you at the *Kommers*!' he exclaimed.

'What do you do at a *Kommers*?' Marcia inquired. She thought his sentimentalities preferable to the Portuguese's sultry compliments.

'Oh, we drink beer and make speeches and

sing songs—it is a grand sight!' he exclaimed enthusiastically. 'And then, of course, we are in full *Wichs*.'

'Your special health, gnädiges Fräulein!' Dom Manuel cried, lifting his glass and trying to divert Marcia's attention. She lifted her glass also, and the Portuguese clinked his against it, leaning across and ogling her out of his black, beady eyes.

'*Prosit*, gnädiges Fräulein!' Walther said, and she had to go through the same ceremony with him.

The wine circulated freely, and everybody drank everybody else's health: it was a continual '*Prosit*, Frau Gräfin!' '*Prosit*, gnädiges Fräulein!' and a jumping up and running round the table to clink glasses. Full justice having been done to the sausages and the *Mehlspeise*, Karl removed the *débris* and placed the glass dish of fruit and a plate of nuts before the Gräfin. He regarded the students with a critical eye, and disapproved of the continual jumping up from table and health-drinking. He was far too military himself not to consider civilians inferior creatures in the scale of creation; but they were the Gräfin's guests, and as such must be respected.

Walther von Vogelschwink, who was cracking nuts, came upon a Philippine. 'Ah, gnädiges Fräulein, you must have this with me!' he cried. The close atmosphere of the room, the wine and his emotions, had deepened his usually ruddy face to the colour of a fiery furnace, and drops of perspiration were breaking out all over his forehead.

'*Ach!* I have one too,' Dom Manuel exclaimed. 'Gnädiges Fräulein, we have a *viel-liebchen* together.'

'We will have ours on *Du and Du*,' Walther cried excitedly. 'We call one another *Du* the whole evening, and whoever says *Sie* first loses.'

'And we have ours on postcards. We send one another postcards every day, and on my postcard I shall always write "I love you" in Portuguese.'

'I shan't do anything so silly,' Marcia declared firmly; 'I shall do it the way we do in England. Whoever remembers to say *Bon jour, Philippine*, at the next meeting, wins.'

Here there was a sound of a knife being knocked against a glass, with cries of '*Silentium!*' and Eugène de Villeneuve rose to his feet.

The duty of making a speech, without which no students would leave the table, devolved upon him that evening, as Ernst, who was head of the corps—*Erster Chargierter*—was the son of the house, and Dom Manuel, who was second in command, had not mastered enough German to attempt such a thing.

'Ladies and Gentlemen,' he began pompously, 'I would only wish to say a very few words, but I cannot allow this occasion to pass without expressing the gratitude and indebtedness which I and my corps-brothers feel to the gracious Frau Gräfin for her charming hospitality. We shall all, I am sure, remember this delightful evening long after our student days are over, and therefore I command that a "Salamander be rubbed"

to the health of the Frau Gräfin von Rühlheim-Hochburg.'

All the students jumped to their feet, seizing their glasses, and Villeneuve commanded, 'One, two, three! One, two, three!' They banged their glasses on the table at each number, then rubbed them violently backwards and forwards without spilling a drop; and at the last 'three!' poured the contents down their throats at one gulp.

'Now a Salamander for the English Mees!' they all cried.

The Gräfin smiled indulgently. She was quite happy when others were enjoying themselves, but Elsa von Dörring bit her lip and glared angrily. It was disgraceful that she—a Baroness—should be made to play second fiddle to this English nobody.

When the Gräfin rose from the table, there was a violent pushing back of chairs on the bare parquet floor. They all pressed round to wish the ladies '*Gesegnete Mahlzeit*,' and both Dom Manuel and Walther von Vogelschwink kissed Marcia's hand fervently.

'What would you like to do now?' the Gräfin inquired, looking round.

'Dance! dance!' the Portuguese cried. He was an adept at the art, and he longed to hold the English Mees in his arms, and show her what dancing really could be.

'It is easy to push the table on one side, and the piano in the drawing-room can be heard perfectly if the doors are left open; but who is to play?' the Gräfin asked.

'Eugène de Villeneuve plays beautifully,' the others cried, and hustled him to the piano. He ran his fingers lightly over the keys, and then broke into one of the irresistible Strauss waltzes. Dom Manuel seized Marcia round the waist, Ernst bowed to Elsa von Dörring, and Walther von Vogelschwink, after having dutifully asked the Gräfin and being told that she only attempted square dances now, seized on a cushion and danced round holding it in his arms, and keeping the tail of his eye fixed upon Marcia. The moment she stopped to rest, he dashed up, and oblivious of the Portuguese's angry scowl, carried her off.

Marcia found that he frequently trod on her toes, and was so hot, that she feared he was in danger of melting away altogether. The heat made his cuts look angry and inflamed, and his collar was reduced to the condition of a limp rag. Luckily, Villeneuve concluded the waltz with a grand finale of fireworks, and Marcia sank on to a seat, hoping that her heated admirer would keep at a respectful distance.

'*Ach*, gnädiges Fräulein!' he exclaimed, mopping his brow with his damp handkerchief, 'I shall never, never forget this evening—it has been the happiest of my life!'

Ernst, who found that Marcia had been appropriated, was paying extravagant attentions to Baroness Elsa. Eugène de Villeneuve sat on the other side, gazing at his long pointed shoes, and wondering if his gorgeous satin waistcoat had been sufficiently admired. The exertions of the evening had caused the cut on his cheek to start

bleeding, and the dab of cotton-wool was rapidly becoming tinged with red.

At this juncture Karl appeared with a tray containing glasses of beer. The students seized these eagerly, drank the contents to somebody's health, and then stood the glasses on the floor or on the furniture, where they left rims of beer, or spilt, leaving trickles of beer on the parquet floor. Though it grew late, the dancing continued with unabated violence. The Gräfin, who had escaped quietly into the study, had fallen asleep over the Fairy Tale in Verse, and Marcia felt tired and cross. At last she refused to dance any longer, and Baroness Elsa said she really must go. Ernst declared that he would see her home, and hoped the English Mees would feel jealous in consequence. After this the other three students had no option but to take their leave also, which they did with many bows and regrets. As Marcia went across to her room, she saw on the table in the passage a little pile of coins, the students' tips to be divided between Marie and Karl.

'Herr de Villeneuve has asked me if I would chaperon a little cousin of his,' the Gräfin remarked on the day of the *Kommers*. 'It seems she is in a *Pensionnat* here, and has never seen a *Kommers* before. Of course I said I would, and I told him she had better join us here. Elsa von Dörring and Hertha von Arnsperg are coming too. Ernst tells me there is room for five in the front of the box.'

Precisely at seven o'clock that evening the

three young ladies appeared, and waited in the passage for the Gräfin. Elsa and Hertha, swathed in the usual dark ulsters, eyed the third girl suspiciously. She was not 'of the Society' they knew, and she wore a white evening cloak edged with swansdown, which filled them with secret envy.

On the Gräfin's appearance they all curtsied and kissed her hand.

'Do the young ladies know one another? Herr de Villeneuve did not mention your name,' she said, turning to the newcomer.

'Anni Müller,' she murmured. A round pink face with a snub nose appeared above the swansdown collar, and between shyness and a lisp the voice was almost inarticulate.

'Then allow me to introduce Fräulein Müller —the Baroness Elsa von Dörring, Fräulein Hertha von Arnsperg, Mees Mar-see-a Ches-vick.' The two noble young ladies eyed the unfortunate Anni Müller with contemptuous disgust, and barely acknowledged her shy salutation. Marcia, who resented this ill-natured snub, went over to the girl's side, and with a few amiable commonplaces smoothed it over. By this time the Gräfin had, with Karl's assistance, struggled into her goloshes and the innumerable shawls and wraps which she considered necessary, and, drawing on the cotton gloves worn to protect the kid ones underneath, they sallied forth into the street.

Elsa von Dörring and Hertha von Arnsperg walked arm-in-arm, whispering excitedly, while the Gräfin followed with Marcia and Anni Müller.

'Not only *bürgerlich*, but called Müller!' Hertha exclaimed angrily. 'Really the Gräfin's good nature leads her sometimes into knowing queer people.'

'I only hope I shan't sit next her,' Elsa whispered. 'I shall ask her if her father is the baker Müller, or the hairdresser.'

They both tittered at this witticism.

'Poor little thing! doesn't she think she is smart in that common cloak, which has probably been bought for the occasion,' Hertha said spitefully. 'However, I dare say none of the students will look at her.'

'She is probably just their style,' Elsa replied. 'The Suevian is the only corps where they are "noble." I believe in the other corps there isn't a single *von*.'

'No, really?' Hertha cried in disgust. 'I can't make out how any girls can *schwärm* for students, except, of course, middle-class creatures.'

In the large, bare cloakroom much time was expended in getting out of all their wraps. Then the Gräfin could not find a penny to give to the man in charge, and was so flustered that she quite forgot to take off her cotton gloves. Anni Müller had emerged out of her swansdown-trimmed cloak, and was attired in the white woollen frock, devoid of style or cut, which the Teuton loves dearly. Her round blue eyes beamed with a disarmingly amiable expression, but the Baroness Elsa and Hertha von Arnsperg eyed her stonily, and then turned contemptuously away. Their own costumes were soiled and the worse for wear, but they considered them quite good enough for civilians.

The band could be heard tuning up, mixed with the sound of glasses clinking and the loud buzz of male voices.

At this moment the door opened, and Ernst, followed by Eugène de Villeneuve, advanced to meet them. They were attired in the full gala of the German student, and were quite conscious of the impression their splendid appearance must make on the girls. Their costume consisted of a sky-blue braided coat, tightly fitting white leather breeches, high boots and white gauntlets. On their heads they had small, round caps, heavily embroidered in gold, and worn on one side in the manner of the British Tommy. Ernst, being *Erster Chargierter*, had a broad, three-coloured sash tied across his shoulder, with gilt tasselled ends hanging down at one side. They saluted the Gräfin and her charges, raising their hands to their caps in the military fashion.

'You had better come upstairs now,' Ernst said to his mother; 'we have already begun.' He led the way up the stone steps, and opened a door on the left-hand side. They found themselves in a small, bare room, like an unfurnished box at the opera.

'I must leave you now,' he said; 'I am wanted below'; and the two students hurried away, with a hasty '*Auf wiedersehen* later.'

There was a row of chairs at the front of the box, and much scuffling and whispering ensued before the party had seated themselves. Elsa and Hertha must sit together, and neither of them could tolerate the proximity of Anni Müller. At last the question was satisfactorily settled: the

despised Miss Müller was wedged in between the Gräfin and Marcia, who had Elsa von Dörring on the other side. This weighty matter being disposed of, Marcia had time to devote her attention to the scene below.

Four long bare tables stretched down the room, one for each of the Waldberg corps. At these were seated the students and their guests, men who had belonged to the corps in past years. All the students wore gala costume similar to that of Ernst, the sole difference being that the colour of the coat varied according to the corps to which the wearer belonged. The guests proclaimed their adherence to a corps by wearing the gaudy-coloured cap, which looked incongruous enough on the heads of bearded and corpulent elderly men. The band was hidden away on a platform covered with evergreens, and on the opposite wall were four erections representing the colours and emblems of the four corps. Ernst stood at the end of the Suevia table, just under the box occupied by the Gräfin and her party. Facing him, at the other end of the long table, was Dom Manuel. They both held drawn swords in their hands. Before each person stood a large mug of beer, and the corps servants were incessantly bringing fresh supplies; as soon as a mug was emptied, it had to be immediately replaced by a full one.

Ernst and Dom Manuel banged on the table with their swords: '*Silentium!* Verse number one!' Ernst commanded. The band struck up, and the students, exerting their powerful lungs to their full extent, bellowed forth one of the well-known student songs. It was of an extremely

sentimental nature, and many pairs of eyes gazed upwards from the Suevia table to the Gräfin's box, and mugs were lifted and drained to the health of its fair occupants. The air was thick with tobacco, combined with the strong smell of beer and heated humanity. Girls with trays of flowers moved about from one table to another, selling little bouquets of violets, pinks, and roses. These the students purchased and presented to one another with every demonstration of affection. They stuck them in the braid of their coats, and the most popular had such a collection that they looked like moving flower-beds.

Anni Müller's round eyes were fixed on the room with an expression of awestruck delight. Hertha and Elsa were inclined to be scornful, the latter chiefly because she had seen Ernst's gaze wander in the direction of the English Mees, and it had not come her way.

'Look at that horrid, fat little man, the third from the end!' Hertha exclaimed; 'he has already drunk twelve mugs of beer, and see how red his hands are. I'm sure he isn't a *von*.'

'He looks common enough to be called Müller,' Elsa giggled.

'I don't suppose he is, or they wouldn't have him in the Suevia corps,' Hertha replied.

Here the door opened, admitting Dom Manuel, Walther von Vogelschwink, and Eugène de Villeneuve, and disclosing a vista of red faces beyond, whose owners were vainly trying to squeeze into the small box.

'For you!' the Portuguese exclaimed, dropping an armful of bouquets into Marcia's lap. He

squatted on the chair behind her, and she felt his hot, beery breath down her neck. Walther von Vogelschwink edged as close to her as possible on the other side His little eyes and elevated nose seemed entirely lost in folds of red, scarred fat. The two noble young ladies saw to their rage that the despised Anni Müller was the centre of quite a crowd of students. They whispered bold compliments into her ear, and were delighted when she lisped '*Ach nein!*' looking down coyly, and blushing in the most maidenly manner. Some of the students, seeing that Elsa and Hertha were alone, came over to their side and tried to make conversation. They inquired if the ladies had been to a *Kommers* before.

'Oh no,' Hertha replied superciliously; 'we only move in military circles.'

'I have a brother who is in the 190th Infantry regiment, stationed at Vorstadt,' Fritz Seifert continued, wishing to make himself agreeable. 'Perhaps you know some of the officers of that regiment?'

'I can't say I do,' Baroness Elsa remarked: 'I think, if I remember rightly, only the Colonel is of the Nobility, and I don't know *bürgerlich* officers.' They were incensed that this creature, who was not a *von* himself, should take pity on them, while the *élite* of the corps were hovering round the English 'Mees' and the plebeian Müller.

'How many mugs of beer can you drink in an evening?' Marcia inquired.

'*Ach!* I drink one hundred,' Dom Manuel cried, smacking his thick lips.

'Come, come,' Ernst interposed; 'I think seventy is the limit.'

'I say I drink one hundred to-night, and all to gnädiges Fräulein's health.'

Marcia considered that they had all drunk too much already, and wondered what their condition would be in another hour.

'We must come downstairs now,' Ernst remarked. 'Look at me, my dear Mees,' he whispered as he passed. 'Every time that I raise my mug, I drink your health. Dom Manuel was swaggering when he said he could drink a hundred mugs. I can drink more than any other student. This evening it will be seventy-five!'

'I have brought up a song-book so that you can follow the words,' Walther von Vogelschwink said, presenting Marcia with a book in which he had scribbled a long and sentimental dedication, signed 'Walther von Vogelschwink.' 'That is our *Zirkel*,' he added proudly; 'we always put it after our names, and it shows that we belong to the Suevia corps.'

'All the students are not here to-night,' Marcia said; 'I have seen some with yellow caps in the town.'

'Those don't belong to a corps, they are only a *Burschenschaft*,' von Vogelschwink replied scornfully. 'We have nothing whatever to do with them. We don't know them; we may not take off our caps to them, even if we happened to know privately some one belonging to a *Burschenschaft*, which of course would be most unlikely.'

'But why mayn't you bow to a person you know?' Marcia inquired.

'Why—oh, because we are corps students and they are not. We mayn't fight them, we can only fight among the four corps.'

The evening wore on, alternating between speeches and songs, both to an accompaniment of incessant drinking. The atmosphere grew so thick that the figures below looked vague and shadowy through a hot film of smoke and beer. It had become almost insufferable long before the climax of the evening was reached in the mediæval ceremony of the *Landesvater*.

The band struck up the fine old tune, and all the students leapt to their feet. The first and second in command of each corps advanced to opposite sides of their respective tables, and jumping on to the empty chairs at the end of the row, clasped their right hands across the board. With their left hands they held the sword on high. The first verse of the *Landesvater* was sung, and as the verse ended they lowered their swords, and the two students on whose chairs they were standing seized their caps, and spiked them through the swords. The two men moved on to the next chairs, and the whole performance was repeated, until they had accomplished the length of the table, and their swords were full to the hilt of spiked caps.

'How tired the band must be of playing that tune over and over again, and how enthusiastic all these men are,' Marcia thought. She looked down at the rows of faces, young and old, all glowing with beer, patriotism, and sentimentality.

The songs, the speeches, the whole tone of the entertainment had been praise of the unsurpassed splendour and desirability of the German student, the German woman, the German life, and the German land. They had worked themselves into such a condition of inebriated exaltation, that many were weeping tears of emotion, and most of them were embracing one another tenderly.

'I think it is time we left now,' the Gräfin said, much upset at discovering that she had still on her cotton gloves.

'Yes, by all means,' Marcia agreed with alacrity, while the two noble young ladies declared they were tired to death. Only Anni Müller, as she left the box, cast one regretful glance at the heated, dishevelled young men, and the long, beer-stained tables.

CHAPTER IX

'WELL, mamma, they are engaged at last!' Uli announced. It always gave him satisfaction to hear of an engagement in which his own name had not been mentioned as the happy intended.

'Of whom are you speaking, Uli, dear?' the Gräfin inquired.

'You never know the things the whole town is talking of,' Ernst commented. He had not yet recovered from the seventy mugs of beer consumed at the *Kommers*.

'The engagements which Waldberg discusses beforehand rarely come off,' the Gräfin remarked, thinking of the many occasions upon which rumour had affianced her dear Uli.

'Then this is the exception. Every one has been betting on what day the betrothal of Graf Radwitz to Countess Armgarde von der Elbe would be made known.'

'Ah, the dear girl!' the Gräfin exclaimed, genuinely pleased; 'and is it definitely settled?'

'Well, I saw them walking arm-in-arm down the Kampfstrasse this morning,' Uli said.

This being the established method of proclaiming an engagement publicly in Waldberg, the Gräfin felt satisfied.

'I must go and congratulate the dear child this

afternoon. Here is a mark,' she added, handing the coin to Uli. 'Will you go to the flower-shop next door and ask Frau Eisenlohr to make up a nice little bouquet for me? I will call for it later.'

Things had, in fact, turned out as Radwitz had anticipated. He had requested an interview with the Herr Graf von der Elbe, and attired in full uniform, with his helmet in his hand, had been ushered into the Graf's private sanctum. The interview passed off with the utmost ease and pleasantness. Graf von der Elbe asked for an account of Radwitz's debts, and though the sum-total was high enough to have horrified most prospective fathers-in-law, the Graf merely made a few notes and remarked that everything should be settled before his daughter's wedding-day.

'There is another thing I should like to speak about,' Radwitz supplemented, and gave an account of his *liaison* with Jenny, and the break he had made recently.

'Well, young men must kick over the traces a bit,' Graf von der Elbe remarked indulgently; 'and you can't expect a lieutenant in a crack regiment to be a saint. You will make none the worse husband to my little Armgarde for that, and I will see that a sufficient allowance is paid to the woman. Armgarde is in the salon, I believe. You had better go and speak to her.'

He smiled genially, and Radwitz mounted the stairs with a sigh of relief. It was a blessing that interview was over; the other would be easy enough.

The poor little Countess, who had been told to put on her Sunday dress and wait in the salon, was in a fever of nervous apprehension and delight. She heard the men's voices down below, and wondered when the grand, beautiful officer who was now her *Bräutigam* would come up, and what he would do. She fidgeted round the room, looked into the glass, wondered if her hair was becomingly done, and was afraid that 'he' might consider her plain. The thought of the exquisite lady in the brocade and pearls persistently obtruded itself. It was true that her *Schwärm*, Erna, had pooh-poohed the idea; but she could not help feeling there might be some truth in it, and that if he had lived with such a vision of beauty, she could not hope to please him.

In the middle of these reflections the door opened: the moment she had dreaded and longed for had arrived, and Graf Radwitz stood before her.

'I have spoken to your papa, and he has given his consent. I want now to know if you are willing to be my wife?' he said.

All the beautiful sentences which Armgarde had thought out for this occasion—sentences gleaned from sentimental novels and conversations at the *Kranz*—fled from her mind. She could only blush violently, twist her pocket-handkerchief round her fingers, and murmur a suffocated 'Yes.'

This, however, was enough for Radwitz. He advanced a step, slipped his arm round her ample waist, and imprinted the betrothal kiss on the cheek nearest to him. 'My dear little Armgarde!

My little *Braut*!' he said, as he drew her to the plush sofa.

She was still quite breathless from the first embrace, though it bore no resemblance to the impassioned kisses pressed on the lips of her favourite heroines. Already she was thinking how interested Erna would be to hear about it all, and how nice it would be to give an extra *Kranz* to tell her friends everything. Erna knew such a lot about men that she would understand. Armgarde was so taken up with these reflections that she hardly heard what Radwitz was saying; but he held her hand between his beautiful white ones, and his epaulette tickled her face. It was terribly forward, but after all, he was her *Bräutigam*.

'I thought we might be married at Christmas,' he remarked. 'I can get a fortnight's leave then, and we could go to Italy for our honeymoon, if you would like that.'

She gasped. To travel abroad with a strange man, and that man her venerated idol!

'Oh, Herr Graf,' she whispered, 'if you would like it, I should think it heavenly!'

He smiled indulgently and stroked her hand: 'You must call me Kurt, and not *Sie*, but *Du*,' he commented.

She gasped again, and hearing footsteps on the landing, jumped up guiltily. The door opened, and the Gräfin von der Elbe entered, followed by her husband.

'My darling daughter!' she cried, running to Armgarde, and embracing her tearfully. Then turning to Radwitz, she kissed him on both cheeks,

and mopping her eyes, said with deep emotion: 'My dear son, may you be a good husband to my beloved Armgarde. This is such a surprise that I can hardly realise that my little daughter is a *Braut*.'

The Graf advanced with dignity, and embraced first Armgarde and then Radwitz. 'I am proud that the two noble and ancient houses of Radwitz and von der Elbe should be united,' he said solemnly: 'my blessings upon you, my children.'

The following day Armgarde, her round face suffused with blushes and gratification, stood in the middle of the salon receiving a stream of friends who had come to congratulate her. The room was full of flowers, while every moment a fresh bouquet was added to the profusion. By her side stood her imposing *Bräutigam*: she gazed up at him with a furtive and admiring glance, hardly able to realise that she would soon be his wife, that they would live in the same house, and that she would have the privilege of pouring out his coffee in the morning and preparing his favourite dishes. How handsome and distinguished he looked with his eyeglass, his fine moustache, and that complacent, haughty smile which showed plainly that he was a Graf with sixteen quarterings.

'My dearest child, how pleased I am!' the Gräfin von Rühlheim-Hochburg cried, embracing Armgarde tenderly, and pressing the shilling bouquet into her hand. Marcia followed, with a beautiful spray of carnations, and expressed her congratulations and good wishes. To her

surprise, Armgarde kissed her effusively on both cheeks and whispered: 'My dear Mees, you will be my bridesmaid, won't you? The wedding is to be just before Christmas, and we are going to Italy for our honeymoon.' Marcia was unaware that she and the little Countess were such great friends, but she declared herself delighted, and wondered what the dresses would be like.

Graf Radwitz was talking to the Gräfin, and as Marcia shook hands with him, his supercilious glance said plainly: 'How upset you must be that your chance is gone!'

'I suppose you have got the *Konsense*?' the Gräfin inquired.

'Oh, that will be all right,' Radwitz replied airily. 'I have notified my engagement to the Commander of my regiment and to the Commanding General, who will send up the papers to His Majesty. Naturally there will be no difficulty when a Gräfin von der Elbe is the bride.'

'Do you have to ask the permission of the Emperor and the Commander of your regiment before you may marry?' Marcia inquired.

'Why, of course,' Radwitz replied. 'Every officer must prove that he and his *Braut* have a certain amount of money between them, and he must also prove that she is of good family and unsullied reputation. Otherwise you might have some young lieutenants bringing a manufacturer's daughter or any other impossible person into the regiment, whom nobody could know. In some Infantry regiments, in out of the way garrisons, I believe they are very slack, and of course in

the *Train* you may marry anybody. In our regiment, however, no officer has married a *bürgerlich* wife.'

The Graf and Gräfin von der Elbe were hovering about among their friends, receiving their congratulations and beaming with satisfaction. Armgarde's mother was a prophecy of what the future Gräfin Radwitz would develop into. The flaxen hair had grown thin, the thick figure had spread, and there were wrinkles round the little blue eyes, but otherwise the likeness was striking. The Graf was tall and pompous, with no sense of humour, an extraordinary memory, and an absolute veneration for the reigning family. As he had plenty of money and an ancient name, he made the ideal Court official.

Armgarde was surrounded by her *Kranz* friends, who were filled with curiosity, not unmixed with envy.

'How did he do it?' Sophie von Holtz inquired eagerly. 'Did he fall on his knees?'

Armgarde had to own that he had not done so, and felt quite crestfallen, as her friends seemed to consider the omission serious.

'Oh, well,' Erna remarked, 'that sort of thing is old-fashioned. Nowadays the lover seizes you in his arms, and stifles you with kisses.'

The little Countess did not wish to confess that she had escaped with a perfunctory peck on her cheek, so she turned to Marcia, who was standing near, and inquired if she had ever been bridesmaid before.

'I was to have been bridesmaid to a friend a short time ago,' Marcia said. 'We had got our

dresses, and everything was arranged. Then at the last minute my friend broke off the engagement.'

This statement was received with cries of consternation. 'How awful! How could she do such a thing?'

'I once heard of a Fräulein von Arnim,' Erna said, 'who found out before the wedding that her *Bräutigam* drank. She broke off the engagement, and now she is an old maid.'

'What a silly!' Hertha von Arnsperg cried scornfully. 'She might have known that after such a thing she would get left!'

'But what a blessing she found out that he drank before she was married to the man,' Marcia commented.

'We consider it nearly as bad to break off an engagement as to be divorced, and of course if you divorce your husband nobody will know you,' Erna announced. She was regarded as the Oracle, and was thought to possess such a comprehensive knowledge of the world that the others always listened to her with respect.

'The men say they don't want to touch bitten fruit,' Elsa von Dörring said. 'The girl who has once been engaged and breaks it off is done for, and doesn't get another chance.'

'You see, your friend will die an old maid,' Hertha remarked hopefully.

Marcia smiled. 'That is impossible. She is married already.'

They all appeared thunderstruck at this phenomenon.

'Ah, well, that is in England,' Erna explained.

'Of course you have all sorts of queer ideas and customs there, so perhaps such things don't matter. Your friend may be glad that she isn't German.'

'I am sure she is,' Marcia remarked quietly.

'I suppose you don't even have a *Ständchen* in England when you are engaged?' Armgarde asked, thinking England must be a very poor place.

'I am afraid I don't know what a *Ständchen* is,' Marcia owned.

'Why, the regimental band plays under your window when you are married or have a baby or are engaged,' Armgarde announced. 'I had such a lovely one this morning! I sent down a list of all my favourite tunes—"Allerseelen," and the "Washington Post," and the Wedding March out of "Lohengrin." I think Kurt is just like Lohengrin.'

The little Countess had never talked so much before, and was quite animated.

'Your Lohengrin wants you, I think,' Hertha remarked.

Radwitz was standing at the other side of the room, making signs to Armgarde to join him. She jumped up with a frightened expression; her temporary animation evaporated, and she crept shyly to his side.

'You mustn't sit whispering over there with those *Backfisches* the whole afternoon,' he said quite angrily. 'Don't you see that Excellenz von Hauken and Frau von Taeuber-Sauergut are here? You must stand by my side and receive their congratulations.'

'Yes, of course,' she murmured nervously. 'Please, please forgive me, dear Kurt.' She looked up at him with a beseeching expression in her frightened blue eyes.

'Very well,' Radwitz replied condoningly: 'only you mustn't forget that you are no longer a *Backfisch*, but my *Braut*.'

'Well, Armgarde, I hope you will be happy,' Excellenz von Hauken remarked, rolling up to the engaged couple and looking as if she thought it extremely doubtful. 'It is a great pity you did not go with Hedwig to the Cooking School at Vorstadt. Your husband won't be pleased when he finds you don't know how many eggs to put into his apple *soufflé*, and can't detect when the cook eats butter herself and declares she has used it for cooking.'

'I know I am very ignorant,' Armgarde said humbly, 'but I will try to learn.'

'When *I* was married,' Excellenz von Hauken continued, 'I knew more about cooking than my cook, and when she told me that she wanted three eggs for the pudding I could jump on her extravagance, and tell her that two were ample.'

Frau von Hauken had now the gratification of feeling that she had made the engaged couple thoroughly uncomfortable: Armgarde was overcome by her own ignorance, and Radwitz felt suddenly apprehensive that his meals would not be properly managed. This restored the Excellenz's equanimity, and she passed on, evolving in her mind several remarks which she knew

would damp the ardour of the too-triumphant parents.

'Now, Mees, we must be going,' the Gräfin said. '*Auf wiedersehen*, Armgarde. May your married life be as happy as mine was,' and she imprinted an affectionate kiss on Armgarde's round cheek.

'What a charming couple!' she observed to Marcia as they walked down the street; 'he so chivalrous and kind, and she so blooming and joyous. They understand one another entirely, don't you think?'

'I think they are admirably suited,' Marcia replied.

'Ah, yes,' the Gräfin continued feelingly; 'I shall compose a poem on their nuptials. The *Braut* I shall compare to an opening flower.'

'I don't think Countess Armgarde is very flower-like,' Marcia objected, thinking of the squat, sturdy little figure and round, ruddy face of the prospective Gräfin Radwitz.

'But she *is* an opening flower,' the Gräfin insisted, 'expanding before the glorious sun.'

'Which I suppose is Graf Radwitz?'

'Yes, yes,' the Gräfin cried, hurrying up the stairs. 'I have got the first lines in my head. I shall declaim the poem at the *Polterabend*.' She brushed past Karl through the open door, and Marcia could see her sitting at the study table, in her juvenile hat and cotton gloves, scribbling without a moment's hesitation.

Marcia retired to her room to write letters; but she could not help thinking of Countess Arm-

garde's frightened expression as she glanced anxiously at the hectoring, arrogant man whom she was so proud to call her *Bräutigam*. It was a good thing, Marcia reflected, that this flower was fairly solid and substantial; otherwise 'the glorious sun' might wither it up altogether.

CHAPTER X

THE great topic of conversation in Waldberg—besides the Radwitz-von der Elbe engagement—was the big entertainment which the Princess Amélie was getting up in aid of her pet charity. Most people forgot what the charity was, but they all clamoured to take part in the entertainment. It was to be a grand affair, combining the efforts of the nobility, the middle classes, and the stage, which on this occasion mixed freely. All those taking part were to be in Eastern costume; and besides many booths and side-shows, there was to be a great spectacular scene, with a ballet. The orchestra of the Grand Opera had offered its services for the occasion, and the Waldberg artists had promised to decorate and paint the huge hall.

The two von Holtzes, Baroness Elsa, and Hertha von Arnsperg were taking part in the show, but Armgarde as a *Braut* was prohibited, and Marcia declined on the plea that she preferred to look on. The Gräfin and Uli were both plunged in preparations and rehearsals. The Gräfin, clad in flowing white garments and a starry crown, was to open the entertainment with an appropriate poem of her own composition; while Uli, attired in Eastern garb, was to sell

postcards, and perform an Eastern dance with Otto von Brösewick and the younger Radwitz.

During the *Kranz* tea-party given by Marcia, at the Gräfin's instigation, the conversation of the noble young ladies had been solely connected with the forthcoming 'Oriental Bazaar.'

'I'm sure I shan't look nice in yellow trousers coming down to my ankles,' Hertha von Arnsperg said anxiously.

'I don't want to wear a veil up to my eyes,' Sophie von Holtz objected. 'It will be so hot, and I shan't be able to talk.'

'My costume isn't a bit smart,' Erna declared angrily. 'One might just as well have no figure at all in those shapeless clothes that look like old tablecloths.'

Nobody listened to any one else's grievances: each was engrossed in telling her own.

'I wish I were waiting in the Café, as you all are,' Baroness Elsa sighed. 'That Egyptian dance is the ugliest, stiffest thing I have ever seen, and the ballet-master scolds us as if we were a set of common ballet-girls.'

'I have never seen a ballet at the opera here,' Marcia remarked. 'Is it good?'

'Awful!' Erna declared. 'You see, we only have the *Hoftheater*, and as the Court is very strict and moral, a diligent inquiry is made into the history of every *balleteuse*, and if anything discreditable is found out, the girl is not engaged. The consequence is that we have the oldest, ugliest *balletcorps* in the whole of Germany.'

'Yes; and do you remember that affair about von Brösewick?' Sophie cried. 'It was found out

that he had given a watch to one of the girls, and she was sacked on the spot.'

'Oh, we look after the morals of our young men,' Erna jeered; 'we are such a highly virtuous town that even the *cocottes* look respectable!'

'Yes, and the young girls are kept so strictly,' Hertha complained, 'that if they didn't take matters into their own hands occasionally, they would never have any fun at all.'

'Well, one blessing is we shan't be bothered with chaperons at the Bazaar,' Erna remarked. 'We can do what we like there.'

They all brightened up at this reflection, and forgot that yellow trousers might be unbecoming, and that Eastern garments are not cut to show the figure.

The great day dawned wet and cold.

'How unfortunate!' the Gräfin remarked at breakfast. 'We shall have to take a cab, Uli, or our costumes might get spoiled.' She looked quite depressed, and then exclaimed with sudden inspiration: 'I know what I shall do! I shall send Karl round to the Hellers and ask them to share the cab. It will then only cost us seventy-five pfennigs.'

When Marcia entered the huge hall that afternoon, she hardly recognised the tawdry, ugly building. The artists had certainly done their work well, and the result was extraordinarily effective. Two enormous painted sphinxes stood at the entrance; round the sides of the hall were booths and Oriental-looking tents, and over the gallery hung Eastern rugs and bright draperies. At one end a large stage had been erected, and

before this a row of red upholstered armchairs, on a strip of red carpet, betokened the expected presence of Royalty. Behind them many rows of cane chairs were provided for the rest of the audience, which was already streaming into the hall.

The Bazaar opened with a great spectacular entertainment on the stage, and long before the appointed time every seat was filled, and the arrival of the Royal Family was awaited eagerly. Marcia found herself next to the fat Frau *Hofpostamtdirektor* Kohlschlegel, who took up more space than her money entitled her to, and was perspiring copiously in her new tight clothes. The other chair was eventually taken by Baron Hennig, in uniform, who greeted Marcia with effusion and appeared amazed at the lucky chance which had brought them together. He informed her that he was not taking part in the Bazaar—he hated all such tomfoolery—but he did not mention that he had effected a change of seats with Leutnant von Lortzing, whose rightful place was next to Marcia.

'The Royalties are coming,' Hennig whispered. There was an expectant hush, then the whole audience rose to its feet, and the feminine portion swept to the ground in a deep court curtsy. Marcia caught a glimpse of a fine, imposing-looking man in glittering uniform, and a lady with a kind face, a simple little bonnet, and a lace cape.

After the King and Queen had taken their seats in the central armchairs, the lesser Royalties seated themselves on either side, and

the row was filled up by their Adjutants and Ladies-in-waiting. Graf Halms-Halms, a cousin of Baron Hennig and Adjutant to the Crown Prince, handed programmes to the Royal party, and the performance began. As the curtain rose, the Gräfin was discovered leaning against a pillar, on which stood a bust of Goethe. In one hand she held a scroll, and her white draperies flowed round her, disguising the deficiencies of her figure and making her appear extraordinarily youthful. Taking a step forward, she lifted her arm, and declaimed the 'Poem' which she had composed for the occasion. It was full of poetic similes, and contained a graceful reference to the august spectators, but it was at least three times too long, and everybody was impatiently waiting for the more frivolous part of the programme to begin.

'I am afraid our Poetess is wound up,' Baron Hennig whispered with a sigh.

'I think her verses are charming,' Marcia replied with warmth, 'and she looks really beautiful.'

By this time the Gräfin had come to the end of her poem, if not of her poetic inspiration, and with a special bow to the Royal couple and another bow to the rest of the audience, she was hidden from view by the descending curtain. There was great applause, headed by the King and Queen, who were much attached to the Gräfin. The curtain rose again, and the Poetess of Waldberg appeared, holding a large laurel wreath tied with the national colours. Marcia could see the glow of pleasure and gratification

on her face, and knew that her kind hostess was now absolutely happy, and that another wreath would be added to the faded trophies in the salon.

Everybody now settled down to enjoyment. There was a short interval, and then the curtain rose, displaying a painted background on which was depicted a large hybrid edifice, partly a mosque and partly an Egyptian palace. In front of this, dressed as a Sultan, on a painted throne, sat Leutnant Braunschweig, a young man who in the intervals between private theatricals drilled his soldiers in a little garrison outside Waldberg. He was more at home in the wings than on the parade-ground, and was possessed of a ready wit and plenty of self-confidence.

By his side was a tall, fair woman, very handsome, on rather too large a scale. She wore voluminous gauze bloomers, and a gold-embroidered zouave; and her magnificent long hair hung down her back in two thick plaits.

'That is Fräulein Suzanna Krinchinsky,' Baron Hennig informed Marcia. 'She is the only good-looking woman at the theatre here, and she will soon have to go.'

'Why?' Marcia asked. 'Can't she act?'

'Oh, it's not that,' Hennig replied; 'but she's too handsome for our susceptible hearts. I hope Graf Max Radwitz won't challenge Leutnant Braunschweig afterwards. It will be fun if he acts up to the rôle of Sultan all evening, and continues to treat her as his favourite!'

'She certainly is uncommonly good-looking,' Marcia observed. 'But I don't think she looks

as if she could act. She seems too lazy and languid.'

'She can act well enough,' Baron Hennig said, sticking in his eyeglass. 'A woman with her face and figure always can. If she weren't a fool she would leave Waldberg and go to Berlin. She would make *carrière* quickly enough there, and be able to buy up the whole of this town in no time.'

'Do they pay the actresses so well in Berlin?' Marcia asked.

'The *première balleteuse* gets more than the Commanding General,' Hennig informed her.

Meanwhile a series of dances was being enacted for the benefit of the Sultan and his favourite, who gazed with rapt attention at the backs of the performers, the only outlook their throne afforded. Marcia looked for Elsa von Dörring among the Egyptian dancers, thinking she would recognise her immediately by the size of her feet; but to her surprise every pair seemed equally vast. She was impressed by the astuteness of the ballet-master, who, recognising the limitations of the squat and heavy young sprigs of nobility whom he had to weld into an impromptu *corps de ballet*, had chosen for them a stiff, conventional dance which demanded neither suppleness nor grace.

The performance finished with the entrance of all the dancers *en masse*. They formed a semicircle of dazzling colour round the occupants of the throne, who assumed a striking attitude as the curtain fell. There was tremendous applause, and the beautiful Suzanna—who had done

nothing but look beautiful—was led on several times by Leutnant Braunschweig. He was bowing and smiling as if the success of the performance were entirely due to his exertions. The Royal party rose from their seats, and the rest of the audience stood around waiting for the signal to disperse. Graf Halms-Halms appeared with the Gräfin von Rühlheim-Hochburg, still attired in her white robes and carrying the wreath in her hand. The King and Queen complimented her cordially, and made a few of the tactful and charming remarks which seem the prerogative of those in high places. Then, accompanied by the other Royalties and their suites, they started on a tour round the room.

By this time the hall was swarming with veiled Moorish ladies, Egyptians swathed in their narrow wrappings, Turks and Bedouins.

In one tent Uli and Max Radwitz, who was quite unhinged by the sight of the adored Suzanna, were turning and twisting in a dance that was certainly more Hungarian than Oriental in character. Noble young ladies in brilliant-coloured bloomers wandered about with trays of flowers and postcards, while noble young officers with stained faces and flowing white garments pestered the crowd to patronise the different side-shows.

'It is very well done,' Freiin von Behrenbach remarked to Graf Halms-Halms, 'but they will only begin to enjoy themselves when we are gone.' She was a little woman with an amiable face surmounted by a dowdy toque, and was lady-in-waiting to the Crown Princess.

The Royal party, having dutifully made the round of all the stalls and side-shows, and having patronised most of them, passed out of the hall amid more curtsyings and bowings. Those who had received Royal notice—and there were many—felt flattered and elated, while those who had not been so fortunate consoled themselves by thinking that, though they were more worthy of attention, a retiring nature prevented them from obtruding themselves on the Royal Highnesses.

Of the latter class were Frau Rosenbaum and her daughter. They dispensed glasses of champagne at various prices, and no money had been spared on the decoration of themselves and their stall, which was brilliant with embroidered silken hangings and masses of rare flowers. Frau Rosenbaum herself was gorgeous in jewelled raiment, with ropes of pearls twisted in her hair, while Edith's Oriental features harmonised entirely with her rich Eastern attire. She looked better than she had ever done before.

'You will allow me to be your guide,' Baron Hennig said to Marcia. 'We will first see all the side-shows and then go up to the gallery, where I believe we shall find the Moorish Café.'

Marcia looked round, and seeing no signs of the Gräfin, consented reluctantly to this arrangement. Apart from the fact that she instinctively mistrusted Hennig, she did not wish him to pay for her at the different booths, and she anticipated a tussle, with victory on the other side. Her anxiety on this score was, however, entirely mis-

placed. As they passed into one of the tents, with 'Admission, 1 Mark' written large over the entrance, she pulled out her purse and said firmly: 'Really, Herr Baron, you must let me pay for myself.'

'But certainly, gnädiges Fräulein,' he replied, making way for her as she put down her money and passed in.

She knew from the tone of his voice that he had not expected anything else, and was so annoyed with her superfluous insistence that she felt inclined to put down a second mark for his admission also. 'I believe he would consider it quite natural,' she thought.

They found themselves in a small, dark enclosure: in front of them was a raised and lighted platform, on which a number of people were grouped, forming an effective tableau. It represented the Sultan in his harem, and Leutnant Braunschweig—lying on a pile of cushions, with a long hookah in his mouth, and the beautiful Suzanna reclining at his feet—seemed to be enjoying himself most thoroughly. The rest of the harem, composed of noble but plain young ladies, was left to languish unnoticed, while the Sultan bestowed all his attentions on the enviable favourite.

'I should advise Graf Max to keep out of this tent,' Hennig remarked. 'Ah, gnädiges Fräulein, if only you were half as kind to me as the fair Suzanna is to her admirers!'

'You should bestow your attentions on some one of her class and tastes,' Marcia returned coldly. She was listening to subdued voices and hysterical

gigglings which proceeded from a dark corner of the room.

'But, Herr Leutnant, you really mustn't. You must remember that this isn't Carnival, even though we are in fancy dress.'

'I assure you, Baroness, it was quite a mistake. I was looking for my pocket in these confounded draperies, and—came upon something else in the dark.'

There followed more whispering and giggling, and Marcia recognised Elsa von Dörring's voice.

'She has evidently managed to lose her chaperon this time,' Marcia thought. 'It is rather hot in here,' she said to Hennig, who was edging closer and closer to her under cover of the darkness. 'I should like to get out.'

She lifted the flap of the tent, and he reluctantly followed her from the stuffy obscurity into the dazzling light and deafening noise of the open hall.

'I don't think I care to go into any more side-shows if they are like that,' Marcia said in disgust.

'No; one can see plenty of flirtations here without paying a mark,' Hennig replied. 'Let us go to the champagne stall. I am desperately thirsty.'

As Marcia was now assured that there would be no question of indebtedness to him, she consented. They passed the Dancing Dervishes and the tent where Gertrude von Reydorf, her vast person swathed mysteriously in veils, told fortunes, and made up to some extent for the snubs she had received by telling her clients a

large quantity of unpleasant and spiteful home truths. At the back of the Rosenbaum's stall a number of lounge seats had been placed; little Moorish inlaid tables were dotted about, and with the silken hangings, the flowers and red-shaded lights, it made a delightful retreat for the consumers of champagne.

Here quite a crowd of people were congregated. The Oriental-Hungarian dancers, wearied by their exertions, had come to drink and refresh themselves. Otto von Brösewick was devoting his attentions to little Lotti Schwarz, the *ingénue* of the *Hoftheater*, who replied to his sallies with considerable spirit and wit. She was attired in Turkish costume, and her small feet, of which she was very proud, were encased in red morocco slippers. In order to draw attention to them, she kept flicking the slippers up and down, until one of them flew off to the other end of the room, and alighted in front of Leutnant Sartusius. He seized a cushion, placed the slipper upon it, and falling on one knee, presented it to the sprightly Lotti. There were shouts of applause, and Otto von Brösewick insisted upon placing the slipper on the outstretched foot. Erna von Holtz and Hertha von Arnsperg, who had come down from the café, were laughing and talking feverishly, trying to distract the men's attention from Lotti Schwarz to themselves. They were determined to show that they could be as unconventional and emancipated as the theatre ladies, but their method consisted in giggling and screaming and drinking more champagne than was good for them, or than they could afford. They only

managed to attract three nervous little subalterns, who had just joined the regiment, and who were thoroughly frightened by the bold onslaughts which the young ladies intended as encouragement.

Frau Rosenbaum moved about among the crowd, replenishing the glasses, and trying to strike up acquaintanceship with the aristocrats who were drinking her champagne. Though etiquette and class distinction were waived for the occasion, racial animosity was as strong as ever: the officers treated Frau Rosenbaum as if she were a barmaid devoid of attractions, and the noble ladies ignored her altogether. Edith Rosenbaum had cornered the unfortunate Uli on a divan, and was plying him with champagne and compliments. He made several feeble efforts to join his comrades, but they were greatly entertained by his dilemma and offered him no assistance.

'You see if that Jewess doesn't catch him after all,' Leutnant von Megersdorf remarked to Graf Max Radwitz, who was waiting for the beautiful Suzanna, with one eye glued on the entrance.

'Well, the girls of our class are so damnably dull and unattractive that nobody can be surprised if we don't fancy them,' Graf Max responded gloomily. 'Look at those two little fools over there, tittering and ogling, and thinking they are so amusing and fascinating.'

'The poor things are kept too strictly as a rule,' Megersdorf replied. 'They are always under the eye of one of those old female dragons, who tell them they mayn't do this and they mustn't say

that, with the result that when they do get a little liberty, they haven't a notion how to behave.'

'And are infinitely worse than the women they despise,' Graf Max remarked. 'Beckon to that old Jewess; I must have a last glass and then go. It is disgusting how much money I have squandered in the tents of Israel, but the fizz is devilish good.'

Ernst strolled up, attired in a new check suit, a pink tie, and a brilliantly embroidered waistcoat. He wore an odd-shaped billycock instead of his student's cap, and imagined that his costume was strikingly English.

Frau Rosenbaum saw him from afar, and her eyes brightened.

'My dear Graf, what a pleasure!' she murmured, leaning over the front of the stall, and affording him a good view of her fine bust and shoulders. 'You must come in here and drink some champagne with me. It will remind us of our happy little tête-à-tête evenings together.'

Ernst frowned and looked round hurriedly to see if this remark had been overheard. As nobody was observing them, he bestowed an admiring glance on her, which took in the whole of her person. 'I should love to,' he said in a low voice; 'and you look damnably handsome. But it wouldn't be a wise move. Your daughter must not see that we know one another well, and the officers would report it to my mother, and then you know what would happen—I shouldn't be able to come and see you again.'

'But Graf Uli is in there sitting with Edith, and paying her no end of attention,' Frau Rosen-

baum remarked. 'Why shouldn't you come in too?'

'My brother can do as he likes,' Ernst replied insolently; 'he has the reputation of hashing all his affairs. *Auf wiedersehen* another day.' He swept off his hat and passed on.

Frau Rosenbaum looked angry and crestfallen, but she had to return to her duties. Certainly her booth was doing a roaring trade, and she would have a large sum—which she intended to augment by several thousand marks out of her own pocket—to hand over to the Committee. If this did not bring her under Royal notice she would be much surprised.

Meanwhile Uli had managed to free himself from the attentions of Edith Rosenbaum, and seizing his tray of postcards, had disappeared hurriedly into the crowd.

Graf Radwitz, with Armgarde hanging like a barnacle on to his arm, came down the hall. He looked bored and bad-tempered, and she tripped nervously by his side, casting occasional admiring glances at her *Bräutigam*, but hardly venturing a remark. The fair Suzanna ran past them, her thick, long plaits flying behind. She was pursued by Braunschweig, uttering cries, and pretending that his favourite had escaped. Radwitz looked angrily after her. If only he had been unattached, he could have cut Braunschweig out, and appropriated Suzanna for the evening. Then he remembered his brother's infatuation for her, and frowned. It was what he called a 'preposterous affection.' Max had spoken of her as a woman any one might be proud to marry, and had ex-

pressed other sentiments which were equally ludicrous and unsuitable. How Armgarde hung on his arm, and how heavy and dull she was! If only he could get rid of her for a little he might enjoy himself.

'Would you like to go in there and have a glass of champagne?' he inquired, thinking he might be able to find somebody in the tent with whom he could deposit her.

'Oh yes, dear Kurt, whatever you wish,' she gasped. 'Anything that you like I should like.'

He thought to himself that however dull she might be, these were the sentiments he desired in his prospective wife, and were more essential to him than the charms she lacked, which he could always find elsewhere.

As they entered the booth, they were joined by the Gräfin von Rühlheim-Hochburg, whose white robes were draggled and soiled: she was so accustomed to her short frocks that the necessity of holding up her skirts had not occurred to her.

'Have you seen the English Mees?' she inquired. 'I am afraid I have been so busy that I have forgotten to look after her.'

'I believe I saw her in the distance,' Radwitz said. 'She was going up to the café with Baron Hennig.'

'Oh, then she is all right,' the Gräfin replied.

Frau Rosenbaum, who had been listening to the conversation, stepped forward effusively.

'Oh my dear Frau Gräfin,' she cried, 'you must come in and drink a glass of champagne with me.'

Radwitz raised his eyebrows superciliously, and passed into the tent with Armgarde.

'Thank you; I should like to,' the Gräfin said simply. 'I am very thirsty after all my exertions.'

Frau Rosenbaum looked at her gratefully. The Gräfin was the first member of the aristocracy who had not snubbed her that evening, and who did not betray any embarrassment when she sat down on the other side of the little Moorish table. The officers, who bowed and saluted as the Gräfin entered, merely shrugged their shoulders. 'How eccentric she is,' they remarked. 'But as long as she doesn't invite the Jewess to meet us, there is nothing to be said.' Eccentricity was kindly permitted to a Gräfin von Rühlheim-Hochburg.

Marcia, who had been unable to shake off Baron Hennig and his persistent attentions, had climbed the stairs to the café, where she had promised to visit the members of the *Kranz*. On the way she purchased several little Oriental ornaments—made in Germany—which she thought the Gräfin might like. Her cavalier made no attempt to carry the parcels for her, but expended his energies in whispering assurances of everlasting devotion into her ear.

In the Moorish café, which was a portion of the gallery shut off from the rest by hangings and draperies, the heat and noise were terrific. The two von Holtzes and Hertha von Arnsperg, who were flushed and excited by the champagne they had imbibed, were dispensing cups of 'Mocha,' which had been brewed out of ordinary household coffee in their own kitchens, and warmed up somewhere in the back regions of the gallery.

'Ugh!' Baron Hennig ejaculated, swallowing his portion at one gulp. 'Imagine calling that

Mocha! I should call it tepid chicory and water. How much, Gnädiges Fräulein?' he asked Sophie von Holtz, who was hovering round.

'One mark the cup,' she replied. 'But there is no restriction as to the amount of the tip,' she added archly.

Hennig dived for his purse, out of which he carefully produced a mark, then after a little further searching he abstracted three ten-pfennig pieces, which he laid with the mark in Sophie's palm.

'I expect gnädiges Fräulein is amassing a fortune with all the tips,' he remarked, as he joined Marcia, who was looking over the balcony.

Later in the evening, when the hall was rapidly emptying, and few except those who had taken part in the entertainment were left, Marcia retraced her steps to the café, to fetch the various parcels she had hidden in a corner. Among overturned chairs, cigarette ends, dirty cups, and little pools of spilled coffee, Marcia detected a figure, huddled on the ground. To her surprise she recognised Hertha von Arnsperg, pale and dishevelled, with her head propped against one of the chairs.

'What is the matter?' Marcia inquired anxiously.

Hertha opened her eyes. 'Oh, I feel so ill,' she groaned. 'I don't know what is the matter.'

'Why on earth are you here alone? Where are the others?' Marcia asked.

'I don't quite remember,' she murmured vaguely. 'I believe I was down in the champagne tent with Erna and Sophie and a lot of

the men, and I suddenly felt so queer that I thought I would come up here quietly. I thought if I could lie down for a few minutes I should be all right.'

'You must come with me at once, Marcia said, realising with horror that the noble young lady was suffering from an excess of champagne. 'We must slip out at one of the side entrances without any one seeing us. You must get home as quickly as you can.' She helped Hertha to her feet, and prevented her from rapidly collapsing again.

'Oh, I feel so giddy and sick!' the noble young lady exclaimed miserably.

'Listen to me,' Marcia said peremptorily. 'You must pull yourself together immediately. If you don't, all the town will know, and you will have done for yourself. Come, lean on my arm, and walk carefully.'

Hertha groaned but obeyed, with a frightened expression. Some of Marcia's words had penetrated into her confused brain. They managed to get down a side staircase without meeting any one, and at the back entrance Marcia found one of the cloak-room officials.

'This lady is ill, and I must take her home immediately,' she said. 'Please get us a cab, and then find the Gräfin von Rühlheim-Hochburg, and tell her that Fräulein von Arnsperg was unwell and that the English lady has gone home with her.' She slipped a two-mark piece into the man's hand.

In the cab Marcia turned to the hunched-up figure which was groaning miserably in a corner.

'How *could* you drink so much champagne?' she said with disgust. 'Suppose one of the men had found you—nobody would have spoken to you again, and they would have been quite right too. It is too revolting'

'Oh dear! oh dear!' Hertha moaned. 'I didn't know. I didn't drink very much.'

Marcia said no more, and when the cab stopped before the Arnspergs' house, assisted her up the stairs and rang the bell.

After considerable delay, a maiden aunt, who lived with the Arnspergs, opened the door. She was in curl-papers and a *Bettjacke*, and appeared perfectly bewildered.

'I have brought Fräulein von Arnsperg back,' Marcia informed her. 'She isn't well, and must go to bed at once.' She pushed the unresisting Hertha through the door, and ran quickly down the steps.

'I wonder what the maiden aunt will make of her,' she thought as she drove home. 'What a headache the horrid little beast will have to-morrow! Perhaps it will teach her how to be decent as well as *Hochwohlgeboren*.'

CHAPTER XI

THE day for the marriage of Graf Radwitz and Countess Armgarde von der Elbe had been fixed, and the preparations were in full swing. Armgarde was in such a fever of excitement and agitation that Marcia was surprised her redundant figure did not show signs of this emotional wear and tear. The *Kranz* friends were always hovering round, and Graf Radwitz kept away as much as possible. There were to be twelve bridesmaids, but Marcia was told, to her surprise, that each one dressed exactly as she liked, so there was no need to trouble about her costume.

Since the bazaar, Hertha von Arnsperg had avoided Marcia as much as possible, and had behaved in a subdued and chastened manner. Marcia had merely told the Gräfin that Hertha had not felt well, and the Gräfin, who was devoid of curiosity, remarked that the poor girl had probably overworked herself for the bazaar. 'She is a dear, sweet child, and always thinking of others,' she said.

Though Marcia felt an immense disgust for the backslidings of the youthful Fräulein von Arnsperg, she was fair enough to realise that the blame lay chiefly with the system. As the aristocratic young ladies were perpetually kept in leading-strings, it was hardly surprising that on

the rare occasions when they managed to escape, they should lose their heads and abuse their liberty.

Some time before the great day an exhibition of the trousseau took place at the von der Elbes' house, to which the friends of the bride and of the bride's mother were invited. On a long table in the salon the bride's underclothing was exposed to the admiring eyes of the guests. The garments were of thick, coarse material, edged with narrow tatting, and looked to Marcia like servants' underclothes. They were all, however, embroidered with a huge nine-pointed coronet and the initials of Armgarde's maiden name.

'There seems to be a tremendous number of each,' Marcia said, wishing to make a pleasant remark.

'Six dozen of everything,' Armgarde replied proudly. 'You see, if we ever settle down on Kurt's *Gut* in North Germany, I shall need them all, as we should only have a yearly washing-day.'

'Good gracious!' Marcia exclaimed in horror, 'do you mean to say you would keep all your soiled things a year before having them washed?'

'They are all put upstairs in a big garret. North Germans say it saves the bother and worry of weekly washing if you do it all in a lump. But, of course,' Countess Armgarde concluded, with a proud glance at her trousseau, 'you need a great many clothes to be able to do that.'

On the evening before the wedding a gathering of their more intimate friends took place to celebrate the *Polterabend*. A curtain had been

erected across one end of the dining-room, and before this the guests took their seats, the *Braut* and *Bräutigam* assuming the place of honour in the middle of the front row. Armgarde looked fatter and pinker than ever, and only her awe of Kurt enabled her to control her excitement.

The performance consisted of a series of scenes, enacted by the *Kranz* friends, and supposed to represent episodes out of the life of the bride-elect. Marcia thought it all very childish and pointless, but Armgarde was in a chronic condition of blushes and titters, and the rest of the audience seemed greatly entertained. The only person who appeared to share Marcia's opinion was the *Bräutigam* himself, who gazed stonily through his eyeglass, his features fixed in an immovable mask of boredom.

At the conclusion of the performance, Erna von Holtz advanced to the *Braut*, carrying the bridal wreath of myrtle on a cushion, and followed by Baroness Elsa with the veil. Armgarde blushed even more, and the mammas mopped their eyes and murmured that it was very touching, and reminded them of their own *Polterabend*.

The evening concluded with refreshments, and the smashing of a large amount of old crockery, which Marcia was informed brought luck to the newly married couple.

At seven o'clock the following morning a blare of trumpets underneath Armgarde's window would have roused her from the deepest slumber, had she not lain awake all night in a fever of nervous anticipation. It was another *Ständchen*, but even the 'Washington Post,' which was played for her

especial delectation, failed to exhilarate her, or give her any self-confidence.

Erna von Holtz and Baroness Elsa arrived later to assist in robing the *Braut.* They tried to keep up her spirits by reminding her of all the friends who had survived the ordeal. 'It had to come some time,' Erna remarked, 'unless you want to be an old maid.' Armgarde uttered a faint remonstrance. 'And after all it's tremendously exciting,' Baroness Elsa exclaimed enviously. 'One reads about it, of course, but they always put stars when things really become interesting, and now you will know.'

'Take my advice,' Erna remarked, 'and don't tell your husband that you know about his *liaison.* Men don't like their wives to have heard of such things.'

'Oh dear!' Armgarde cried, her agitation breaking out afresh at the thought of the exquisite creature in the satins and pearls, 'I'm sure I'm not beautiful enough for him, and I am so afraid at the thought of being quite alone with a strange man who is not Papa.'

'Well, mind you tell us all about it,' Elsa insisted. 'I shall never forgive you if you behave like the novel-writers and stop just where I most want to know.'

'Oh, well; after all, marriage isn't so very wonderful,' Erna remarked in a superior manner. 'You will probably think your Lohengrin not quite so beautiful when you see him without his padded uniform, and in an *Es ist erreicht*'[1]

[1] The slang name for the appliance used to train the German moustache upon the model adopted by the Kaiser.

Armgarde looked shocked and horrified. Oh, Erna!' she expostulated feebly.

'Well, you don't suppose his moustache grows up in that beautiful manner without assistance, do you? I bet you ten to one he wears stays and a *Bartbinde*.'

'And sleeps in kid gloves to keep his hands white,' Baroness Elsa suggested.

'He has the most beautiful hands I have ever seen,' Armgarde cried. 'But I don't believe he sleeps in gloves, and you are only saying that, Elsa, to tease me.'

'Well, you will know soon,' Erna remarked. 'And now you must finish dressing. It doesn't matter if you are late at the church—that only heightens the effect of your entry—but you must be punctual at the *Rathaus*.'

They squeezed Armgarde's ample form into the black silk dress which is the attire prescribed for a German *Braut* at the civil wedding, and necessitates a second robing for the church ceremony.

'Ah, my darling daughter,' the Gräfin von der Elbe cried, embracing her tearfully. 'This is a terrible plunge, but you must keep up your spirits.' Armgarde was now weeping copiously herself, and there ensued a regular orgy of tears and kisses.

'I hear the carriage,' Erna exclaimed. 'You must not keep your *Bräutigam* waiting.' The fear of incurring Kurt's displeasure served to rouse Armgarde. She jumped up, blew her nose violently, and ran down the stairs.

Graf Radwitz was waiting in the hall with his

brother and Graf von der Elbe, who were acting as witnesses at the civil marriage. He cast one glance at the red nose and swollen eyes of his bride, and then silently followed her into the carriage.

In the interval between the two ceremonies a large crowd collected outside the church, an ugly building with white stucco decorations and unstained windows, through which the light streamed crudely. There was nothing beautiful or mysterious about the interior, which, but for the pulpit and a small table with a crucifix, might easily have been taken for a rather tasteless concert-room. The guests poured in to an accompaniment of selections from 'Lohengrin,' and all the seats were rapidly filled. Those not occupied by relations and guests were snapped up by curious spectators.

'I don't think much of the costume the bride's mother has chosen for the occasion,' Frau von Heller whispered to Excellenz von Hauken. 'She told me it came from Paris and cost two hundred marks, but I don't believe it.'

'And look how she is weeping and dabbing her eyes,' the Excellenz replied. 'You wouldn't think she had plotted and planned ceaselessly to secure a husband for her plain daughter.'

'Yes, there are other girls who are so much handsomer. Think of my Erika and Grete, for instance.'

Excellenz von Hauken sniffed scornfully. 'The von der Elbes took good care to let people know what *dot* they were giving Armgarde,' she remarked. 'Last year, before Hedwig went to the

Cooking School, Graf Radwitz paid her the most marked attention.'

The twelve bridesmaids were whispering and giggling in the vestry with the twelve young men who had been appointed as their cavaliers. They were all officers in Radwitz's regiment, and wore gala uniform for the occasion. The girls were attired in their best costumes, and Marcia thought she had never seen such a painful clash of colours and shades. Pink appeared to be the general favourite: Baroness Elsa wore a bright salmon crepe; Hertha von Arnsperg had chosen a bluish pink, cheap silk; while four of the others were attired in shades varying from magenta to rose. The von Holtzes were very fashionable in ultramarine sun-ray skirts; and Marcia herself, in a beautifully made white gown, was the one restful note in this hideous riot of colour. None of the bride's-maids wore hats. They had all had their hair most elaborately dressed by a coiffeur who bicycled round to their various houses, with the curling-tongs sticking out of his pocket, and only charged a mark for his trouble.

Marcia was afraid that Baron Hennig would fall to her lot, but was relieved to find that he had been coupled with Hertha von Arnsperg, and that Leutnant von Megersdorf was her cavalier.

'You know it is my pleasure to look after you for the whole day,' he informed her, 'and you must resign yourself to having me for your *Tischherr*.'

He had quite a nice, open face, and was devoid

of many of the affectations which annoyed Marcia in his comrades.

'I wish I knew which hotel they are going to for the first night,' Otto von Brösewick exclaimed. 'I would send them a postcard and print on it in large letters "Good luck and *bon repos.*" All the hotel would know then.'

There were such explosions of laughter at this witticism that Marcia was afraid the noise would penetrate into the building.

'Radwitz has taken good care to keep his arrangements dark,' Hennig remarked. 'But Countess Armgarde will give the show away wherever they go.'

'They are devilish late,' von Brösewick said, looking at his watch. 'Perhaps the bride has fainted or repented at the last minute.'

'Perhaps the *liaison* has come and made a scene at the house,' Baroness Elsa whispered to Erna. 'She may have thrown a bottle of vitriol at Armgarde.'

'Nonsense!' Erna replied. 'It is only French creatures who do that. Here such a thing never occurs.'

At this moment the sound of wheels was heard, and the bridal couple alighted at the door.

'We must go in now,' Graf Max whispered. 'Will Baroness Elsa and Herr von Brösewick lead the procession?'

All the men offered their arms to their respective ladies, and formed into line one behind the other. The organ struck up the march from 'Lohengrin,' and they streamed into the church.

At the altar the couples separated, the girls going on one side and the men on the other, until they had joined in a semicircle, meeting behind the altar table. The parson, in his ugly black robes, stood waiting, and an expectant hush fell upon the assembly.

'Here they come,' Grete whispered. The organ redoubled its efforts, and the bridal couple moved up the aisle and stood alone before the altar steps. Armgarde was clutching desperately at Radwitz's arm, as if she were drowning and he were her last hope. This illusion was heightened by the colour of her face: all the blood in her body seemed to have been forced upwards by the tightness of her white satin dress. The bridegroom stood by her side, tall and erect as if he were on parade. Under one arm he held his feathered helmet, and he wore the white trousers of full gala, which may only be donned on two occasions — when the owner attends his own wedding or is bidden by the reigning sovereign to a State function.

The parson read the marriage service in the monotonous voice associated with religious ceremonies, and nobody listened to the words. Armgarde with an effort relaxed her hold on Radwitz, and tremblingly handed the large and ungainly bouquet to Erna, who officiated as best bride's-maid.

'I wonder what he is thinking,' the poor little bride thought, casting a nervous side-glance at the immovable figure beside her, to whom she was now bound for life. 'How grand and stern he looks!' She pulled feverishly at her kid glove,

in sudden panic lest she should not get it off in time, but she was so hot and flustered that each finger presented an almost insurmountable difficulty, and when at last the feat was accomplished, her face was moist with the exertion and panic. She dabbed it surreptitiously with her pocket-handkerchief, but the long, tulle veil got in the way, and she looked like a frightened white rabbit caught in a mosquito net.

'There is not a crease in my trousers,' Radwitz was thinking, 'and I look finer than I ever did in my life. All the girls are admiring me and envying my bride. I could have had any single one for the asking. It was bad luck I had to choose such a plain one, but I had to make some sacrifice. The poor little thing knows nothing, and will be easily satisfied. Once the honeymoon is over, she will be no trouble at all, and it is worth a fortnight's boredom to get my debts paid.' He cast a hasty glance round the tightly-packed church, and wondered if Jenny had come to see his wedding, or if perhaps interested curiosity had brought the fair Suzanna. 'One does not marry the attractive woman,' he thought resolutely. 'We do not want our wives to be too attractive. Religious, devoted, highly-born, economical, and capable of bringing forth male children—these are the requirements.'

The parson took the two wedding-rings from a plate, and placed them on the fingers of the bride and bridegroom. Armgarde twisted her ring spasmodically, it would hardly go over her hot, plump finger. When the huge, black-bound Bible, which is presented to all bridegrooms in the

Lutheran Church, was handed to Radwitz, he showed the first signs of embarrassment. He felt that it spoilt his appearance, and after putting it first under one arm and then under the other, he eventually handed it to his brother.

The ceremony was now at an end, the organ boomed out the triumphant refrain of the Mendelssohn Wedding March, the trembling but proud Armgarde slipped her hand through the arm of the magnificent creature who was now her husband, and they turned to go.

'My dearest child!' Gräfin von der Elbe exclaimed tearfully, embracing the bride and catching her sequined bodice in the long veil. She was about to transfer her embraces to her son-in-law, but he moved on impatiently, dragging Armgarde with him.

The wedding breakfast was a long meal. Everybody sat down with the fixed determination to make up for the emotions and exertions of the day by a comprehensive onslaught upon the viands provided.

'Delicious soup!' General von Solms remarked, half swallowing the spoon in his anxiety not to lose any. 'I never get soup like this at home. That comes of being a widower.'

'What a charming wedding!' the Gräfin von Rühlheim-Hochburg remarked. She was seated on one side of the General, and was decked in white, with pink ribbons. 'That innocent, sweet young thing, confiding her life and happiness to the care of that fine, courtly officer. Did you notice the fond and protecting manner in which he looked down at her?'

'I wonder where they got that fine salmon from,' the General commented, watching its progress round the table. It must weigh at least twenty-seven pounds.' He transferred a large chunk to his plate, tucked his napkin firmly under his chin, and devoted all his attention to the pleasant business of eating.

'And what a picture the bridesmaids were,' the Gräfin babbled on happily, 'so gay and bright in their pretty dresses, just like a bed of flowers.'

'Dear Kurt,' the bride whispered shyly into the bridegroom's ear, 'I do hope you are happy. *I* am so happy and proud to think that you are really my husband. You *do* look so handsome, all the other girls are green with jealousy.'

He patted her hand condescendingly under the table. Of course they were envious, but he was glad that she realised this. She seized his hand in hers, and would have liked to sit thus for the rest of the meal, but he hastily withdrew it, for her hand was hot and clammy; and besides he was extremely hungry, and wished to do full justice to the dainties which were being served.

'You must eat properly,' he said. 'I don't want you fainting on the way.'

She said 'Yes, dear Kurt,' submissively, and gulped down a lump of venison.

The bridesmaids, meanwhile, were exerting themselves to the utmost. They had been told that many engagements had been achieved at wedding festivities, so why not their own? Much sprightliness and vivacity were displayed. 'Even Lotti Schwarz could not be more entertaining,' Erna thought complacently.

'I am sure Herr von Brösewick is only waiting for the opportunity to admire my dress,' and Baroness Elsa looked down at it with a sigh of satisfaction. Their cavaliers were certainly most lively and attentive, and luckily the poor young things were unaware of the fact that the excellent meat and drink had done more towards this end than their own charms. After each succeeding course the men discovered all sorts of engaging qualities in their companions which they had previously not noticed.

'What a beautiful dress gnädiges Fräulein has on!' Otto von Brösewick said to Marcia, who was seated on his left.

Erna von Holtz, overhearing this remark, and wishing to show that she was broad-minded and well-dressed enough herself to appreciate the toilette of a rival, chimed in: 'Ah yes, Mees, I have been admiring it all the time. May I ask of what material it is made? I suppose in England you still wear gathered skirts. Here we have quite given them up for pleats.'

'But the dress of the English Mees is so smart,' von Brösewick interrupted. 'There is about it a particular "something" which no German dressmaker ever achieves.'

The young ladies looked annoyed at this assertion, and Marcia, who had been listening with amazement to the conversation, heard them discuss and argue about each costume, the men taking an active part in the debate, and sandwiching in many compliments upon the charms of the wearers.

'This sort of thing seems so strange to an

English person,' Marcia remarked to Leutnant von Megersdorf, who had remained outside the discussion. 'We never talk about one another's clothes unless we are on the most intimate terms with any one.'

'Here it is very different,' he replied. 'A young lady feels she has not been appreciated if the men do not admire her costume, just as we think it ungracious and discourteous to our hostess if we do not comment upon the excellence of the food which she has provided.'

There was a stir at the other end of the table, and Graf von der Elbe rose to his feet. The speech-making had begun. The girls sighed impatiently at this interruption to their flirtations, while the lieutenants yawned surreptitiously and filled up their glasses with champagne.

The speeches were lengthy and tedious, and nobody wanted to listen. The bridegroom, however, derived great satisfaction from his rôle: as he sat down after responding to the toast of his bride and himself, he felt that he was a born orator, as well as the handsomest man in the Army. After innumerable toasts to the bride's parents and the widowed mother of the bridegroom, and to the remainder of the collective relatives, General von Solms tore himself away from his food, and proposed the health of the ladies, interspersing his speech with affectionate comparisons between them and his favourite culinary delicacies.

To the relief of everybody, this concluded the speeches. Gräfin von der Elbe rose from the table, and the whole company followed her and

the bridal pair into the large salon, which had been cleared of all furniture. At the piano a man was hammering a waltz, accompanied by a squeaky violin. The bridegroom led off the dance with the newly-made Gräfin Radwitz, who was greatly embarrassed by her train and her veil and the number of eyes which were following her progress down the room. She stumbled and trod on Kurt's toe, which so annoyed him—especially as he wished to exhibit his grace and elegance—that he stopped abruptly and declared he did not care to dance.

All the bridesmaids ran up to him, and Baroness Elsa stood on tiptoe and tied a handkerchief round his eyes. The girls then joined hands and danced round him in a ring. Meanwhile the performance had been repeated upon Armgarde by the young officers, who formed another ring round her.

'We dance quickly in a circle,' Erna informed Marcia, who could not understand these preliminaries. 'When the bridegroom says "Stop" we stop, and whoever he points at will be the next bride.'

'And what happens afterwards?' Marcia questioned.

'Afterwards? Why nothing, except that it is very exciting to know which of us will be married next. Armgarde does the same thing with the men. Take care. We are off.'

They whirled round until Radwitz commanded 'Stop.' He then advanced a step, and pointed between Marcia and Sophie von Holtz. However, with a little judicious wriggling and edging,

Sophie managed to bring herself almost in front of the pointed finger, and looked coyly delighted when Radwitz pulled off his bandage and declared that she would be the next bride. Each of the other young ladies was bitterly disappointed that the finger had not been pointed at her, and muttered something about 'cheating,' and 'just like that mean little Sophie.' At that moment Armgarde ran up, declaring that certainly Graf Max would be the next to marry; she had pointed straight at him, and she wondered who it would be.

Dancing now began in earnest, and in the thick of it the bridal couple escaped to change for the journey.

'Well, do you feel as if you were married?' Erna inquired, tugging at Armgarde's hooks. She was one of those people whose clothes always seem too tight for them.

'I don't know what I shall do when I have said good-bye to all of you, and we have started off alone,' Armgarde replied tremulously.

'Don't be silly. You know we should all of us be thankful if we were in your shoes,' Erna remarked with unusual truth. This seemed to comfort Armgarde considerably, and she accomplished the rest of her toilette in comparative calm. When, however, the finishing touches had been put to her tasteless attire, and calls for the bride were heard from below, she seized Erna's arm and whispered anxiously into her ear: 'Dearest Erna, you know so much, please tell me if anything very dreadful is going to happen to me.'

Erna laughed and disengaged herself hurriedly. 'You're a little goose!' she exclaimed, 'and don't deserve the luck of having got a husband. I am only nineteen and shall have a bigger *dot* than the Hellers or Hertha von Arnsperg, and yet I often lie awake at night with the fear that I may through some mischance get left. I would rather my husband beat me than be an "*alte Schachtel.*"'

All the guests had assembled in the hall and on the steps to see the departure of the newly-married couple. The bridegroom, attired in a ready-made suit of *Civil* and pale lemon-coloured boots, was talking nonchalantly to a circle of admiring friends.

'Good-bye, my beloved child,' the Gräfin von der Elbe cried, with more tears and embraces. 'Take care of yourself and remember all I have told you.' She had of course told her daughter nothing which could have been of the slightest assistance to the poor little bride.

'It is time to go now,' Radwitz remarked, tearing Armgarde from the embraces of her *Kranz* friends. 'We don't want to start by losing the train.' He bundled her into the carriage amid a shower of confetti and good wishes, and they rattled off down the street and into their new life.

The wedding guests gazed after them with mixed feelings, and then resumed the interrupted dancing, flirtations and gossip, which were carried on until past midnight. The members of the *Kranz* now felt they must redouble their efforts. One of their number had stolen a march upon

her companions, who could not rest until they too had safely entered the haven of matrimony. As well brought up German girls, they realised that the most disastrous marriage was a hundredfold preferable to spinsterhood.

CHAPTER XII

'How unfortunate!' the Gräfin exclaimed, looking up from the pages of the *Waldberg Landeszeitung*. 'Prince Adalbert is dead, and as he is first cousin of our Princess Amélie, that means Court mourning.'

'Will that make any difference to the balls?' Marcia inquired anxiously.

'Oh no, the balls will take place all the same,' the Gräfin said; 'only they will be postponed; and that means everything has to be squeezed into the short time before Carnival. Her Royal Highness the Princess Amélie had graciously commanded me to take tea with her this afternoon. I shall hastily write a poem on the death of Prince Adalbert, put on my black silk, and take it myself to the Palace. Of course Her Royal Highness will not be receiving, but she always appreciates my poems, and it can be reprinted afterwards in the *Landeszeitung*.'

The Gräfin was always taking tea with various members of the Royal Family. They showed a neverfailing interest in her poetic effusions, which on these occasions she carried in a little reticule, and read aloud to her august friends.

'I will speak to Gräfin Schemberg about your presentation to Her Majesty,' she continued. 'It will probably be postponed also.'

Marcia was unaware of the difficulties and formalities which she had been spared by the Gräfin's intimacy with the Court. Being under the protection of an old and valued friend of the Royal Family, the English Mees escaped the tedious preliminaries, and the searching and impertinent cross-questionings, without which no transaction, of either a business or a social nature, can be accomplished in the Fatherland.

Meanwhile Christmas was drawing near, and all the Waldberg shops burst forth into festive and tasteless decorations. The Königstrasse, where the best shops were situated, presented quite an animated appearance. Despite the intense cold, everybody *bummeled* up and down, looking in at the windows and greeting their acquaintances. Officers strolled along in twos and threes, with their swords clanking after them, and the fur collars of their pale grey overcoats turned up to their ears. The two von Holtzes and Baroness Elsa, with interlaced arms, giggling and talking, bowed coquettishly in response to the salutes. As a rule they were not permitted to *bummel* in the Königstrasse between the hours of twelve and one, when the street became a place of rendezvous for the inhabitants of Waldberg, who paraded up and down and stared at one another. The girls were never allowed to speak to the men, or the men to accompany the girls, but they seemed to derive a vast amount of entertainment from passing and re-passing one another, and from the mutual conviction that they were being admired.

The Gräfin and Marcia, followed at a respectful distance by Karl, had gone to the *Marktplatz* to select a suitable Christmas tree. They wandered round the large square, which was filled with fir-trees of every size and shape, and looked like a miniature forest. After much deliberation and many heart-searchings, the Gräfin, in a burst of extravagance, bought a beautiful little silver fir, which Karl carried home, much to the detriment of his white cotton gloves.

'In Germany every family, however poor or old, has a Christmas tree,' the Gräfin informed Marcia. 'This year we shall be quite a small party; only ourselves and Herr von Megersdorf, whose people live too far off for him to go to them.'

Uli came home early on Christmas Eve, and closeted himself all afternoon with Karl in the dining-room. 'My dear Uli always decorates the Christmas tree for me,' the Gräfin said tenderly. 'He has done it ever since he was quite a little boy.'

At eight o'clock Leutnant von Megersdorf arrived with a beautiful bouquet of roses for the Gräfin, and immediately afterwards the dining-room door was thrown open, disclosing the tree in a blaze of candles and tinsel. The Gräfin clapped her hands in delight, as if the whole thing were an entire surprise, and ran up to kiss Uli, whose handsome face was beaming with pleasure.

'Mamma and Uli are quite childish about their tree,' Ernst remarked in a superior manner.

'There may be different opinions on the subject of what is childish,' Marcia responded icily. I consider the devotion of your mother and brother delightful, but I think it ridiculous to fight persons with whom one has no quarrel, and to disfigure oneself for life.

Ernst bit his lip, and tried to think of a blighting retort, but Marcia had turned to Herr von Megersdorf, and they were examining together the beauties of the tree. At its base were a number of parcels, and Marcia saw the neat inscriptions: 'Dear mamma, from Uli'; 'Dearest Uli, with loving wishes from his devoted mamma'; and the two were opening these together and uttering exclamations of pleasure and surprise. There were warm woollen gloves to protect Uli when he rode out to *Dienst* on the bitter winter mornings, and a new postcard album which he had long desired. A large roll proved to be a gaudy rug for the Gräfin's bedroom: she had once complained that hers was old and threadbare, and Uli had given up some little extravagances to buy her a substitute. Ernst's contributions were two glasses emblazoned with the Corps arms for his mother and Uli, and a little pot of heather tied with the Corps colours for Marcia. She wished he had not given it to her; she had nothing for him, and was conscious of having just administered a sharp, if deserved, snub. The Gräfin was radiant. She had collected all her presents—which included a handsome leather writing-case from Marcia—and was showing them to each person in turn. 'How kind their Royal High-

nesses are!' she exclaimed, sniffing at a plantation of lilies-of-the-valley, growing in a fine blue bowl. 'They always remember me, whatever happens.'

After supper they all sat round the tree, and Karl handed glasses of steaming punch. Ernst was sulky, and sat drumming with his fingers, and glaring at the others. He felt that he was not appreciated, and was infuriated to see Marcia and Herr von Megersdorf laughing and talking together. Uli had fetched a pile of picture-postcards, and was hastily fixing them into his new album.

'I have a little Christmas Carol which I should like to recite to you,' the Gräfin said, rising from her chair. 'Dear Uli, call Marie and Karl. They, I know, would like to hear it too.'

The servants, who had already had their *Bescherung* in the kitchen, came in and sat at the extreme end of the room. Ernst yawned noisily and stretched his magenta boots in front of him; Leutnant von Megersdorf stopped abruptly in the middle of an amusing experience of the last manœuvres, and Uli pushed the pile of postcards away. His eye fell on the top one. It represented a bunch of forget-me-nots, and underneath was written: 'The ice ought to bear in three days. I shall expect to meet you there. *Toujours à vous* E. R.' Ernst, who was sitting near, also glanced at the postcard and started. Could Frau Rosenbaum be carrying on simultaneous flirtations with his brother and himself? Then he suddenly remembered that 'E' stood for Edith

as well as for Ella. Of course, Frau Rosenbaum was far too astute a woman, he reflected, to make her assignations on a postcard. What a fool Uli was to allow this girl to entangle him, and how diplomatically he, Ernst, had managed *his* affairs. He hardly liked to think where he should be now, had not Frau Rosenbaum come to his rescue. He was devilish grateful, and had shown his gratitude by the attentions he had paid her ever since. He now hardly considered himself in the light of her debtor. What were Jews for, he should like to know, except to lend money to Christians? and she was amply repaid for the paltry sum by the privilege of his society and friendship. His eyes wandered round the room. What a stuck-up, unpleasant creature this English Mees had turned out to be! He would punish her in the future by ignoring her altogether. How boring were mamma's poetic platitudes! He wished he had spent the evening at the Kampfstrasse. He wondered what Jews did at Christmas. Perhaps they ate the thin round cakes with holes which he had seen in a Jewish baker's shop. . . . Thank Heaven that was over!

The Gräfin sat down, and Leutnant von Megersdorf complimented her in a few polite words. Uli, feeling comparatively safe in the proximity of his mother, edged a little nearer to Marcia and asked her if she would like to see his postcard album. His idea of social entertainment was that of a child displaying his toys for the edification of his companion; and when all the postcards had been looked at in turn, he gazed

anxiously round the room for something else to show the English Mees.

'Mamma, where is the description of your journey through Switzerland, which you illustrated yourself?' he inquired.

'It is in the salon, locked in my writing-table,' the Gräfin replied, jumping up with alacrity. 'I will fetch it. Perhaps you would like me to read extracts from it aloud.'

Ernst groaned, and Leutnant von Megersdorf rose to his feet.

'What a pity!' he exclaimed. 'I fear I must go now. Herr von Engelsberg has sprained his ankle, and I promised to sit with him. Perhaps another time I shall have the pleasure of hearing the Gnädigste Frau Gräfin read.' He kissed the Gräfin's hand and thanked her for the most pleasant evening. As he said good-bye to Marcia she noticed a merry twinkle in his eye, but though he had evidently had enough of poetic effusions, she thought he was too good-hearted to jeer at their kind hostess.

'I know that sprained ankle,' Ernst remarked as they heard the front door shut. 'I wish I had thought of it myself. I might have gone with him to console Engelsberg at the Café Heintz.'

The Gräfin looked at him with a puzzled expression in her guileless eyes, but as she could not understand the remark, she dismissed it immediately from her mind.

'It is getting late,' she said, 'and perhaps we had better retire. Uli, blow out the lights on the tree; they have nearly burnt down. Good night, dear Mees; good night, my dearest son.

This has been a very, very happy evening.' She kissed Marcia for the first time, and they separated for the night.

Ernst had already disappeared, and Marcia surmised that he would now celebrate Christmas according to his own tastes, with the company assembled at the Café Heintz.

. . . . . .

Edith Rosenbaum had prophesied correctly: three days later there was skating on the artificial lake in the public gardens. Early in the morning the ice was crowded with people. Herr von Megersdorf and Uli escorted Marcia, for as they all carried skates it was considered quite proper.

One of the regimental bands was playing, and on a small peninsula which jutted into the lake, a crowd of mammas was gathered, all of them red-nosed and muffled in wraps. From this point of vantage they could overlook the entire stretch of ice, and follow the movements of the skaters. In order to do this, they were ready to endure any cold and discomfort.

'Who are those three who have just put on their skates?' Frau von Taeuber-Sauergut inquired. She was short-sighted, and the glare of the sun on the ice dazzled her weak eyes.

'It is the English Mees with Herr von Megersdorf and Uli von Rühlheim,' Frau von Holtz replied. 'I wonder which of the two she is after.'

'Whichever she can get, I expect,' Excellenz von Hauken remarked grimly. 'However, Uli has left her already. He is talking to a big girl

in most extravagant furs.' The Excellenz was gazing through her opera-glasses: 'Why, it is that Jewess, Edith Rosenbaum! You see if she doesn't marry him.'

'Well, it would serve his mother right for asking such creatures to her house and trying to make us meet them,' Frau von Arnsperg said spitefully.

'Have you heard the latest about Marie Findler?' Excellenz von Hauken asked.

'No, what?' they all cried eagerly, crowding round and forgetting for the moment the interests of the ice. 'Do you mean the manufacturer heiress, who they said was engaged to Baron Hennig?'

'Yes, that one; but it was ridiculous to imagine that Hennig ever intended to marry her. Well, I have it straight from my cook, who heard it from the cook of the flat above mine, who was getting some five-pfennig cakes at Müller's *Conditorei* and saw the whole thing. This Findler girl was sitting at one of the tables with a friend, eating cakes and drinking coffee with whipped cream. Suddenly she falls back on her chair with a cry, turns quite pale and dizzy and sick——' Excellenz von Hauken paused dramatically, and looked round at her audience.

'Well, what happened next?' they inquired breathlessly.

'The friend was overcome with fright and agitation, and pressing a twenty-pfennig piece into the hand of the Pfeiffers' cook, begged her to go to the next cab-stand and fetch a cab as quickly as she could. When the cab arrived,

Marie Findler was supported into it in a fainting condition, and was driven off to the hospital.'

'No? How awful! How shocking!' they cried, in delighted horror. 'Do you suppose Baron Hennig is responsible?'

Here Frau von Heller, who had not spoken before, broke into the conversation. 'I happen to know,' she remarked, 'that Marie Findler is suffering from a severe attack of appendicitis. I was at the hospital this morning and spoke to one of the nurses.'

All the faces fell considerably, and there was an exclamation of disappointment.

Excellenz von Hauken snorted ominously. 'We have heard of that sort of appendicitis before,' she remarked sceptically. 'You see if it does not entail a lengthy change of air. I expect she has a married sister with a large family, one of whom she will kindly offer to adopt.'

They all nodded their heads, and turned their attention again to the ice. The only skaters, whose reputation was not entirely torn to shreds, were the daughters of the various mammas present. Though most of them were numb with cold, and agitated about the midday meal, no one dared to leave first. They knew well the remarks which would be made the moment they had turned their backs, and were so suspicious of one another that it ended in the whole assembly leaving the ice together.

'I hope you enjoyed yourself,' the Gräfin said to Marcia.

'It was lovely!' Marcia exclaimed enthusi-

astically. 'The band played splendidly, and Herr von Megersdorf and I had a very jolly waltz.'

'An invitation has arrived for us while you were out,' the Gräfin announced. 'Princess Johann Albrecht has graciously commanded us to take tea with her to-morrow. I told her that your introduction to Her Majesty was postponed till the first Court ball. You must wear black, and remember to call the Princess *Königliche Hoheit*.'

The following afternoon they started out on foot to the Prinz Johann Palace, a featureless white building, looking on to a fine, tree-grown square. They passed the sentries on either side of the entrance, and a lackey in the royal livery opened the door. He was evidently an old friend of the Gräfin's, and they conversed confidentially while he helped her to take off her shabby ulster and goloshes. A second lackey relieved Marcia of her fur coat, and a third took the brown-paper parcel which the Gräfin had carried carefully under her arm, and followed the visitors upstairs. At the head of the staircase two footmen flung open the big folding-doors, and they found themselves in a moderate-sized room, comfortably, but not luxuriously furnished.

The Princess Johann Albrecht was the King's aunt, and had been a widow for many years. She had two children, a son and a daughter. The latter, whose marriage had been celebrated with much pomp at Waldberg, ten years previously, was plain and dull; but she had rendered herself popular with her subjects by regularly presenting

her husband with a son, and her kingdom with a prince, every year.

Princess Johann Albrecht's son had not been such a comfort. He was handsome and dashing, with an unfortunate predilection for ladies of the ballet. He had shown a strong objection to marrying some plain princess and settling down in the respectable and dull Court of Waldberg, which he seldom graced with his presence.

'The Princess is extremely gifted,' the Gräfin remarked. 'She can paint beautifully, and play, and speaks five languages with equal facility. And she has extraordinary literary criticism and appreciation. I am always expected to bring some of my writings to read aloud to her—she would never forgive me if I omitted to do so.'

Marcia admired the tact and kind feeling of the august lady, and thought that she had her reward in the pleasure which the Gräfin derived from the royal appreciation.

The door opened, and Freiin von Rittersgut, one of the ladies-in-waiting to the Princess, came in. Her short, plump figure was attired in a plain black dress, and her colourless hair was drawn tightly back from her face. 'Ah, Frau Gräfin,' she said, shaking hands, 'Her Royal Highness has just got back from her walk, and will receive you both in a few minutes.'

'This is the English Mees, Mees Mar-see-a Ches-vick,' the Gräfin said, and the Freiin von Rittersgut, after shaking hands and uttering a few commonplaces, withdrew again.

After another short wait they were ushered

through several rooms into the royal presence. On the threshold the Gräfin swept a deep curtsy, and Marcia followed her example. The Princess Johann Albrecht advanced a step to meet them. She had a short, thick-set figure, and wore the plainest of black gowns, rather masculine in cut, and devoid of any trimmings or embellishment. Her face was finely cut and strong, with a poise of head which indicated the habit of command; and despite her unprepossessing attire, she could not have been passed in a crowd, or have been mistaken for a person of humble origin.

'My dear Gräfin, this is a pleasure,' she said cordially.

The Gräfin made another deep curtsy, and kissed the outstretched hand. '*Königliche Hoheit* is too amiable. This is the English Mees, Mees Mar-see-a Ches-vick, whom *Königliche Hoheit* was gracious enough to command also.'

The Princess held out her hand to Marcia, who in her turn swept to the ground.

'Is this the first time you have been to Germany?' Princess Johann Albrecht inquired. She had a deep and singularly resonant voice, which gave interest even to commonplace remarks. Marcia, who had been told that it was incorrect to begin a sentence with *Nein* in speaking to Royalties, replied that she had travelled in Germany before, but that this was her first visit to Waldberg.

'Well, I am afraid my English has grown very rusty,' the Princess said pleasantly, speaking the language with a correctness of pronunciation and intonation which astonished Marcia. 'My friend

the Gräfin is, I hear, a most ardent English scholar.' She sat down and motioned her guests to chairs opposite her.

'My dear Rittersgut,' she said, turning to her lady-in-waiting, 'you have, I know, letters to write. I shall not require your attendance this afternoon.' Freiin von Rittersgut curtsied and retired.

'And now you must tell me how the literary labours are progressing,' Princess Johann said to the Gräfin.

'Ah, *Königliche Hoheit*, I have finished five parts of the second volume of my Fairy Tale in Verse. I have brought the proofs, thinking that *Königliche Hoheit* might like me to read them, also a copy of the poem which I recited at the Oriental Bazaar, which I should feel honoured if *Königliche Hoheit* would accept.'

'My best thanks, dear Gräfin. You must read the Fairy Tale to me after tea. What extraordinary energy and industry you display in everything you do. If only the younger generation would emulate your example, but I am afraid we are drifting into an age of frivolity, idleness, and luxury. My mother used to tell me how much she spent on her wardrobe when she was young,' the Princess continued, turning to Marcia and speaking in French; 'and I assure you it was a sum at which most *bourgeoise* girls of to-day would turn up their noses.'

Marcia glanced at the Princess's garments, and thought she evidently took after her mamma.

'Luckily, my nephew hates display and ex-

travagances, and the Court is quiet in its manners, its morals, and its dresses. I wish the tone of other Courts and towns were like that of Waldberg.' The Princess sighed. Perhaps she was thinking of her handsome son, and the diamond necklace which he had presented to Mlle. Fifi de Foljambes. A foreign newspaper had come into her hands, with a notice saying that the Prince F—— K—— of W—— had been seen at Monte Carlo with the beautiful dancer, Mlle. F—— de F——, losing large sums at the tables. A paragraph was devoted to the costumes of the famous dancer, which were even more magnificent and costly than those of the other ladies of her class who thronged the Casino. The Princess's strong lips closed tightly, when she reflected that she would have to pay for those iniquitous chiffons, and all the other adornments which her son lavished upon Mlle. Fifi and her companions.

'We must go in to tea now,' she remarked, rousing herself, and leading the way into another room, where the tea-table was having the finishing touches put to it by several lackeys. The Princess sat at the end, with a guest on either side, and the lackeys handed round tea, and plates of caviare and meat sandwiches. Marcia noticed that, like Karl, they wore white cotton gloves. Having attended to everything, they put the silver dishes on a side-table, and retired noiselessly.

'Well, Gräfin,' the Princess said, 'have you not any news for me? You know,' she continued, speaking in English, 'I depend upon my friend

here for all my information on what is happening in the town.'

'Ah, *Königliche Hoheit*!' the Grafin exclaimed. 'I never hear anything, I am too immersed in my work. Now, when my dear husband was alive, I was in the thick of it all.'

'Yes, how devoted my brother was to the Graf,' Princess Johann replied. And they both plunged into reminiscences of the time when their husbands were alive, when the Gräfin was not old and poor, and the Princess was not troubled by her son's amorous adventures and the fear that he would fritter away his manhood without providing an heir to inherit his great name.

Occasionally the Princess turned to Marcia with some remark which included her in the conversation. As she spoke English, French, and German alternately it was rather difficult always to answer her in the correct tongue.

'Now you must read me your poem,' Princess Johann said, after they had finished tea; and she listened to the Gräfin's declamation of the Fairy Tale in Verse, with an interest which Marcia thought entirely genuine.

'Ah, my dear Gräfin, you have the gift of language,' she remarked at the close. 'Your rhymes are always happy and never strained. I suppose you are having this privately printed. Please put my name down for three dozen copies. There are many friends I should like to send it to.'

The Princess rose from the table: 'It has been

a great pleasure to see you. You must come again soon.'

This was the sign of dismissal. They kissed the royal hand and curtsied themselves out of the room.

The Gräfin was beaming with delight as she pattered home in her large goloshes.

CHAPTER XIII

PUNCTUALLY at the end of the fortnight the newly married couple returned from their honeymoon, and took up their abode in the flat which Graf and Gräfin von der Elbe had furnished and equipped for them.

Some days after their arrival the *Kranz* friends rushed round to see the bride, and to bombard her with questions.

'Dearest Armgarde,' Baroness Elsa cried, flinging her arms round the bride's neck. 'Tell us all about the honeymoon—was it very delightful?'

The young Gräfin Radwitz, however, was unusually reserved and uncommunicative. Matrimony had already taught her the necessity of deception, as well as having imparted an apprehensive expression to her face, which had not been there before.

'How dull and disagreeable marriage has made her!' Hertha von Arnsperg exclaimed as they left the flat, having failed signally in the object of their visit. 'She wouldn't tell us a thing about the honeymoon, except that they saw the Coliseum.'

'And went in a gondola,' Sophie von Holtz exclaimed scornfully. 'As though we cared to hear that!'

Meanwhile the poor little bride, in an unbe-

coming apron, was vainly trying to make an omelette for the dinner of her lord and master. The cook whom her parents had provided could have made it infinitely better, while she only succeeded in burning her fingers as well as the omelette. She was pathetically anxious, however, to fulfil the duties of a *Hausfrau*, and to please Kurt, which she found was not a very easy thing to do.

In the middle of her culinary operations she heard the front door open, and her husband's voice in the passage.

'Dear Kurt, you back already!' she cried, running out to meet him. He and his brother Max were unbuckling their swords, and hanging up their caps in the passage.

'What the devil have you been doing with yourself?' he asked ill-temperedly, looking at her scarlet face and dishevelled hair, and noting the kitchen aroma which hung about her whole person.

'I have been making an omelette for you,' she replied falteringly. 'I thought you would like it.'

'My dear Armgarde, I wish you would realise that cooking is not your strong point. You had far better leave it to Christine—you only succeed in making yourself in a horrid mess. My brother wants a talk with me, so please see that we are undisturbed.'

'It is a shame to intrude on a newly married couple,' Max said, kissing her hand. 'But I won't detain Kurt long.'

'I suppose there is some food for *Mittagessen*?' the latter remarked. An unmistakable odour of *Sauerkraut* was permeating the flat.

'Yes, dear Kurt, there is *Rehbraten*, which I know you like, and an omelette.' Her lip trembled as she thought of the scathing comment which her ill-fated effort would evoke. Kurt frowned. His mind reverted to Jenny's *Rehbraten*, cooked to perfection. *She* was never hot and flustered, and never smelt of the kitchen.

'Well, Max, stop to *Mittagessen* with us, if you aren't afraid of starving,' he said, as he led the way to the smoking-room, a tiny apartment adjoining the salon. They sat down on opposite sides of the white china stove, and Kurt handed his brother a box of cigarettes.

'You had something special you wished to speak to me about?' he said. 'Debts, I suppose. Remember I can't bleed the old papa-in-law indefinitely. He has just had to stump up a pretty stiff amount for me.'

'It is not exactly debts this time,' Max replied, blowing the smoke through his nose and speaking with difficulty. 'It is an *affaire du cœur*, and I thought as you are just married yourself you would understand and help me.'

'Well, I hope she has got plenty of money,' his brother remarked. 'That is, if it is a question of matrimony.'

'Yes, if I can marry her I shall be the happiest man alive,' Max exclaimed with feeling.

'You needn't expect either help or sympathy from me if you have been idiot enough to engage yourself to a poor girl,' Kurt said tartly. 'You know that now papa is dead, and the value of land is low, it is our duty to marry money, to keep up our name and property. I own that it is a

difficult job to find money combined with birth, and naturally a Graf Radwitz cannot marry out of the aristocracy, even if it were a question of millions.'

Max's face had clouded over during his brother's speech. At last he burst out: 'Well, I must tell you. She is neither rich nor noble.'

Kurt's jaw dropped, and he stared blankly at his brother.

'Not noble!' he ejaculated. 'Not even rich! Why, you must have taken leave of your senses. What do you mean by this damned tomfoolery?'

Max turned white, and his heavy lips twitched under his upturned moustache. 'It is no tomfoolery,' he said defiantly. 'I intend to marry Fräulein Suzanna Krinchinsky.'

'What?' Kurt cried, jumping up as if a bomb had fallen between them. 'That woman? You want to marry her—a creature one could possess for the asking! Go off with her for a fortnight to the Riviera, but for God's sake don't talk of marrying her.'

Max had jumped up too, and the brothers stood glaring at one another.

'I forbid you to speak in these terms of the lady I intend to make my wife,' Max said in accents of suppressed anger and excitement. 'Though she is beautiful and poor, and an actress, she is as pure as any of those aristocratic little fools you would have me marry. I know,' he continued, seeing the sneer on his brother's face, 'you consider virtue in a woman only lack of opportunity, but, thank Heaven, I have not such

a low opinion of them. I don't believe that in order to be sure of the virtue of one's wife, it is necessary to marry a nonentity, devoid of all beauty and charm. I would stake my oath on Suzanna's virtue.'

'To think that my brother could be such a damned fool!' Kurt exclaimed, his face flushed with rage. 'To be bamboozled and caught by a pretty face, like a green subaltern just out of the *Kadettenschule*! One thing I tell you,' he said violently: 'if you marry this woman, I have done with you.'

'How dare you, of all people, set yourself up on a pinnacle?' Max shouted angrily. 'You, who besides your dozen other amours have lived with a creature for years, and only gave up her and your illegitimate family to get your debts paid, and marry a silly little thing whom you openly despise.'

'Well, I have married her, and not the other,' Kurt retorted. 'Did I ever say I objected to your living with your Suzanna as long as you like? Live with her and anybody else, but for Heaven's sake don't attempt to make her a Gräfin Radwitz. You owe it to the family to keep the name clean and free from blemish.'

Both men, in the heat of the argument, had raised their voices, and were oblivious of the fact that every word could be heard on the other side of the curtained door. Poor little Armgarde, crouching in the salon with a piece of sewing, listened with dilated eyes and a look of bewildered horror. She had gathered enough from the conversation to be assured of what she had already

guessed, that Kurt did not love her. The rest was immaterial, and hardly made an impression on her dazed and feeble little mind.

'You must be mad,' Kurt repeated. 'Of course you would have to leave the Army, and then, pray, what would you do with your precious Suzanna? I presume you haven't told mamma anything about this degrading affair?'

'I wrote to her all about it,' Max replied sullenly.

'And what did she say?

'Here is the reply. You can read it if you like,' and Max tossed it over to his brother. The letter, written on paper heavily embossed with the Radwitz crest and coronet, was dated from their *Schloss* in North Germany, and ran thus:——

'My dear Max,—Though I cannot pretend that your news has not upset and disappointed me greatly, I know the Radwitz temperament far too well to offer any opposition. If you are determined to marry this person, you will do so, and I should only alienate you if I set my face against it. Of course it will mean leaving the Army, and as I cannot afford to give you a larger allowance than you have had up till now, you will have to find some work to do in order to support yourself and your wife. It is unfortunate that, having been brought up as an aristocrat destined for the Army, you know nothing, but doubtless you will be able to find some little post which will enable you to live in a manner suitable to your altered circumstances. Try not to quarrel with your brother over this affair.

Family feuds are vulgar, and I hold them in horror.

'I send you my blessings, my dear son, and hope sincerely that the woman you have chosen will compensate for everything you are giving up.—Your devoted mother,

'ELIZABETH, GRÄFIN RADWITZ.'

Kurt read this with a darkening frown, and threw it on to the table. 'She must be in her dotage,' he exclaimed fiercely. That comes of marrying a foreigner. I always wondered how my father could have chosen an Austrian for his wife. Even the most noble families have slack ideas. Look at the scandals and *mésalliances*, even in their Royal Family.'

'You shan't say a word against our mother,' Max retorted hotly. 'I imagine she had a pretty hard time with papa, though she never breathed a word against him, or uttered a single complaint.'

'Papa was a true Radwitz,' Kurt replied proudly. 'He may have had the Radwitz failings, but he was orthodox and correct to the backbone. Of course he gambled and was fond of champagne, and knew a pretty face when he saw it, but his vices were never unworthy of his birth and station. None of his sins were plebeian. Good God! he would turn in the Radwitz vault if he knew of the disgrace you contemplate bringing on the family. So mamma hopes we shall not quarrel about the affair, does she? I swear to you,' he cried, bringing his clenched fist down on the table, 'that if you marry this woman, I will never speak to you again.'

'So be it,' Max said coldly. 'I can live without you.' He turned abruptly and left the room. Armgarde, trembling in the salon, heard the clank of his sword as he strapped it on in the passage. She would have liked to run out and tell him how sorry she felt, but terror held her back, and she knew that all sympathy for him would be unpardonable heresy.

Kurt sat glaring at the opposite wall until he heard the front door slam. Then he got up and went into the salon.

'What are you doing here?' he demanded, looking suspiciously at Armgarde's red eyes and frightened face. 'Isn't *Mittagessen* ready?'

'It is quite ready, but I did not like to disturb you,' she replied timidly, following him into the dining-room. Kurt's soldier servant, in a new livery, handed round the *Rehbraten* and the omelette. After sniffing at his plate, Kurt pushed it back, and flung down his knife and fork.

'The food is uneatable again,' he exclaimed petulantly. 'You can take it away.'

Fritz, the servant, removed the plate, with an apprehensive glance at his master. Unfortunately the knife slipped, and clattered to the ground.

'What are you doing, you clumsy lout?' Radwitz shouted. 'You aren't fit for any place but a pigsty. Clear out, or I'll give you two days' arrest on bread and water. Quick March!'

Fritz clicked his heels together. '*Zu Befehl, Herr Leutnant*,' he said, and left the room hastily.

'I shall go to the Barracks,' Kurt exclaimed

pettishly. 'Anyhow I can get something fit to eat there.' He pushed back his chair, and without another word left the room.

Armgarde tried to swallow a mouthful of the despised omelette, but it stuck in her throat. 'He' was not there to mind if she had swollen eyes and a tear-stained face, so she laid her head on the table, and sobbed bitterly.

CHAPTER XIV

At last the longed-for invitation to the court ball had come. A lackey in the Royal livery, holding up an umbrella to protect his top-hat from the rain, had deposited two huge cards at the Gräfin's house.

'Here is yours,' the Gräfin said, handing one to Marcia. It was without an envelope, and across the top was written her name. Underneath were the Waldberg arms, and the imposing words: '*Auf allerhöchsten Befehl.*' By the 'most high order' the *Ober-Hofmarschall* had the honour to invite Miss Marcia Cheswick to the court ball on the 31st January. Then followed a long rigmarole; and at the bottom of the enormous card Marcia read that five hundred guests had been invited, that the prescribed attire for gentlemen was full gala uniform or court dress, and for the ladies *Ausgeschnittenes Kleid.*

'If only some royalty doesn't die before the 31st,' Marcia said anxiously. Never before had she taken such an interest in the health of the reigning families of Europe; and the indisposition of a venerable sovereign caused her many apprehensive moments.

However, the great day dawned without any mischance occurring.

'It seems quite fine,' the Gräfin remarked, peer-

ing out of the window. 'I should think we could walk to the ball this evening. Last year Uli and I walked. I was well wrapped up, and carried my white satin shoes in a bag.'

Marcia was taken aback by this suggestion. She did not wish to arrive at the palace crumpled and untidy after a walk through the town, and she well knew the enshrouding defined by the Gräfin as being 'well wrapped up.'

'I should like to order a carriage,' Marcia said diffidently, 'and I wonder if you would give me the pleasure of driving with me.' She looked anxiously at the Gräfin, afraid lest this suggestion might be considered an impertinence.

Her hostess, however, thanked her quite simply, 'I shall be very glad to drive with you,' she said. 'Karl had better go round at once to order the carriage, or they may all be taken. You see one must have a carriage and pair to drive to the court ball.'

This was another surprise. Apparently the Gräfin thought nothing of trudging through the streets with her shoes in a bag, and yet could not entertain the idea of driving in a one-horse conveyance.

'The ball begins at eight o'clock,' she continued. 'I shall order the carriage for ten minutes past seven, so that we are in good time.' As it only took seven minutes to drive to the palace, the margin seemed more than ample.

After an early tea, or rather coffee, the Gräfin and Marcia retired to dress. There was much hurrying to and from the Gräfin's room, and many calls for Marie, who combined the duties of cook,

lady's-maid and dressmaker. A large portion of the Gräfin's costume had, apparently, to be constructed on her. After many rummagings a piece of old lace came to light which was considered indispensable for the front of the bodice, and a large bow gave a finishing touch on the left shoulder. At the last moment Marie declared that the skirt really was too short in the front, and hastily sewed on a mauve silk frill, which served to veil the upturned tips of the soiled white shoes.

'Come in, my dear Mees,' the Gräfin said, surveying herself complacently in the strip of glass. She turned to Marcia, and for the first time expressed admiration of her costume. 'It is really beautiful,' she said. 'Take care you don't get it torn. It is looked upon as incorrect to tear your dress, especially if you are dancing in the Royal *Carré*. Once Fräulein von Reuter, who was wearing a long muslin dress, caught it on her partner's spurs, and it became so entangled round his legs that they fell together just in front of the royal party. For a long time after that everybody was commanded to wear short dresses.'

Marcia wondered whether this was the reason the Gräfin always wore her skirts well off the ground, but as they trailed at the back, they seemed equally dangerous. Meanwhile Marie was encasing the Gräfin's satin-shod feet in knitted bags, and over these the large goloshes were pulled. Her head was swathed in countless clouds and mufflers, and a large striped shawl was tucked in under the inevitable ulster. She looked with horror at the satin and chiffon evening cloak,

which Marcia considered ample protection for a drive in a closed carriage.

'My dear Mees,' the Gräfin exclaimed in consternation, 'you must wrap up properly. You do not mean to say you were going with nothing on your head. You will catch your death of cold.'

'But in England we never put anything on our heads when we go out in the evening,' Marcia remonstrated.

'It is suicide. What should I say to your mother if you got ill? Besides, only servants go out with the head uncovered.'

Marcia, seeing that resistance was useless, tied a scarf over her hair, which apparently pacified the Gräfin.

Uli now appeared, looking very imposing in the full gala of his *Garde* regiment.

'The Mees has kindly asked me to drive with her,' his mother informed him. In her innumerable wrappings she looked like an animated mummy.

Marcia glanced at Uli. She instinctively felt that he was afraid of her, and she avoided sedulously anything which he might interpret as an advance on her part. On the present occasion, however, she considered it a question of courtesy. 'I hope you will drive with us,' she said politely.

Uli bowed and clicked his heels together. 'Gnädiges Fräulein is very amiable. I shall be delighted,' he replied.

'I suppose you know,' he said to his mother when they were seated in the carriage, 'that Graf Max Radwitz's resignation has been accepted.'

'What a pity!' the Gräfin exclaimed. 'It is a great loss to the regiment. What has happened to the lady?'

'Suzanna Krinchinsky has also retired into private life.'

'It is very sad,' the Gräfin sighed. 'But it shows how they care for one another, and true love is always a beautiful thing.'

They had now got into a stream of carriages, and it was some little time before they stopped in front of the chief entrance of the Royal Palace. Lackeys in gorgeous liveries opened the door and assisted them out. The Gräfin, who seemed as much at home here as in her flat, hustled Marcia into a room where a number of ladies were already assembled, disburdening themselves of their various wraps, and putting finishing touches to their toilettes before the pier glass. It was an extremely simple apartment, and with the piles of ulsters and shawls looked more like the cloakroom of a village hall than anything else. One of the attendants assisted the Gräfin, but the operation of unwinding her took an interminable time.

'You are going to be introduced to Her Majesty this evening too, are you not, Mees?' Grete von Heller inquired. She was standing before the glass, fixing two large pink roses into her crimped hair.

'Well, I'm glad I have not got to be introduced at the ball,' Baroness Elsa remarked, looking at her reflection over Grete's shoulder. 'It breaks into your dancing horridly, and if their Majesties are late, it means you miss no

end.' She glanced down admiringly at her new dress. It was of sky-blue tulle, and stuck out in stiff folds; sprigs of brilliant and obviously artificial forget-me-nots sprouted all over it, and in her hair.

'It is a good thing there will be three of us, anyway,' Grete said, struggling into her gloves, which only reached half-way up her substantial, red arms. There will be Hertha, the English Mees, and myself.'

'I am just ready, Mees,' the Gräfin said. She had produced various articles of jewellery out of a small bag, and was fixing them on to her person. 'Now we will go upstairs.' She nodded to the two girls, and passed into the hall with Marcia.

'Ah, Frau Gräfin, I was looking for you,' a shrill voice exclaimed, and the vast figure of Gertrude von Reydorf blocked their way. Her enormous frame was draped, but not disguised, in voluminous folds of soiled white satin—the *débris* of her mother's wedding-dress—and she wore her tow-coloured hair gathered up and passed through a gilt band, which in her opinion imparted a Grecian air to her costume.

'My mother was suddenly indisposed, and could not come to-night,' she lied hastily. 'Might I walk up the stairs with you, my dear Gräfin? It is only so that I do not appear to be alone.'

Poor Frau von Reydorf, sensitive and retiring, had at last rebelled, and firmly refused to take her elephantine and overblown daughter to the balls to be gibed at by everybody. Gertrude,

however, who never lost hope of catching some unwary or helpless male, had definitely declared she would go. She knew she could make the good-natured Gräfin Rühlheim-Hochburg take her, at least nominally, under her wing; and perhaps she could entrap a few of the partners who failed to secure a dance with the English Mees.

'Of course, if you are alone, you may come up with us,' the Gräfin said, but without her usual cordiality. She had some experience of Gertrude, who resembled a giant burr, only to be shaken off by an earthquake or a man.

They ascended the broad, red-carpeted staircase, Marcia and Uli walking together, the Gräfin following with Gertrude von Reydorf, who talked loudly and incessantly.

Groups of officers in gorgeous uniforms moved about, and at the head of the staircase Graf Haussonville, one of the King's adjutants, advanced towards them and greeted the Gräfin ceremoniously. 'You know, Graf,' she said, 'Mees Chesvick is to be introduced to Her Majesty this evening.'

'Ah yes, she will wait in the Red Salon until their Majesties come. Fräulein von Feldheim is in the ballroom, and has all instructions.'

'You are acquainted with Her Majesty's ladies-in-waiting,' the Gräfin said as they passed on. 'They will tell you everything.'

The ballroom, which was situated in the middle of the palace, had a lofty domed roof, supported by marble pillars. It was lit by enormous chandeliers, in which innumerable gas-jets burned;

for electric light had only been adopted by the shops in Waldberg. The scene was brilliant with an enormous variety of glittering uniforms: besides the Waldberg officers, representatives from every garrison in the kingdom flocked to the court ball. As Marcia looked round, she thought that every uniform in the German army must be represented, and was surprised at the enormous preponderance of the male element. Even Gertrude von Reydorf, she reflected, ought to secure partners in this crowd.

But Gertrude herself was not so confident. 'If only I don't get left for supper or the cotillion,' she whispered anxiously.

Uli had fetched a programme for Marcia, but to her surprise did not ask for a dance. 'He does not mind driving in my carriage,' she thought, 'but evidently the poor fellow thinks it would be incriminating to waltz with me.'

'Gnädiges Fräulein is, I hope, not engaged for supper.'

Gertrude, thinking the remark was intended for her, turned with a surprised and delighted smirk. Then her face fell as she saw Baron Hennig bowing before Marcia.

'I don't know the ropes well enough to refuse him,' Marcia thought, regretfully opening her programme, on which were emblazoned the Waldberg Royal Arms. To her surprise she saw that only six dances were marked, and all of these were lancers and quadrilles.

'There are no waltzes,' she said, handing the card to Hennig.

'Only the supper waltz, which I shall take,' he replied. 'You see, there are so many more gentlemen than ladies that one does not engage for the round dances. That gives everybody a chance.' He scrawled his name on the programme, bowed, and clicked his heels together.

'Ah, Baron, it is a long time since we have had a talk,' Gertrude von Reydorf cried archly, dangling her empty card before his eyes. 'You are such an exquisite dancer that I suppose you are quite full up?'

'I am afraid I am,' he responded insolently, giving her a stare through his eyeglass and an imperceptible bow as he passed on.

'Ah, Grete, there is that handsome Leutnant von Sonderheim, who has such a heavenly moustache,' Baroness Elsa whispered excitedly. 'I shall stare at him very hard, and perhaps he will come over and ask me for a dance.'

'I wish I had been already presented,' Grete complained. 'I know we shall be taken off to the Red Salon, and then there will be no more opportunity of getting one's programme filled.'

'Look at the English Mees,' Sophie von Holtz exclaimed. '*She* need have no anxiety about being left.'

Erna and Sophie von Holtz already felt that their evening was spoilt. Previously they had enjoyed the proud distinction of being the best dressed girls in Waldberg society. Now they instinctively realised that their ready-made cerise dresses looked dowdy and crude near the flowing, dead-white chiffon robe which adorned the slim figure of the English Mees.

'I wish we had silk foundations,' Erna said regretfully. 'We don't even *rustle*.'

'Mees! you will have to go now,' the Gräfin exclaimed, beckoning to her protégée. 'Have you spoken to Fräulein von Feldheim? She is just behind you.'

Marcia greeted the lady-in-waiting, who had a thin, well-bred face, and was unostentatiously attired. 'Their Majesties will be coming soon now,' she said. 'I will take you to the Red Salon, where you must wait.'

She led the way with Marcia, followed by Hertha von Arnsperg and Grete von Heller, who cast regretful glances at the groups of lieutenants, and wondered anxiously if the free dances on their programmes would be filled up.

They found themselves in a medium-sized room, upholstered in red, and with large, gilt-framed mirrors on the walls. Here were assembled various Excellencies: high Court officials and generals, with corpulent figures, and breasts covered with as many medals as if they had fought in every battle of the century. But these dwindled into insignificance compared with the dowagers, whose vast figures were ruthlessly displayed in their low dresses, and seemed to Marcia to fill the whole room.

Fräulein von Feldheim departed, and an onslaught of stares was directed upon the three girls left standing alone. Excellenz von Hauken, who looked like a huge mottled toad, raised a lorgnette with a mock tortoise-shell stem, and fixed Marcia stonily. She could see nothing through the glasses, but considered the use of a

lorgnette imposing. Marcia wondered if she was expected to go over and curtsy to her, but was afraid the Royalties might arrive in the meantime, and decided therefore to remain where she was. Hertha and Grete were tittering nervously, and trying to catch glimpses of the ballroom—and the lieutenants—through the open door.

The time was beginning to drag intolerably. Marcia, conscious of the antagonistic comments of the horrid old women who were whispering and staring in such an ill-mannered fashion, felt like a new scullery-maid in the servants' hall.

At last there was the sound of a stick rapping the ground, and all the Excellencies got on to their feet as quickly as their corpulence would allow. The door at the end of the room flew open, and the ladies sank down in a protracted curtsy, while the men saluted and stood at attention. First came the *Hofmarschall* with his baton of office, followed by two or three of the highest Court officials, and then came the royal couple, bowing and smiling as they advanced. Marcia, rising from a second deep curtsy, was conscious of a kind pair of eyes looking at her from a face whose chief beauty lay in its charming expression. The smooth, brown hair, parted in the middle, was surmounted by a magnificent crown of brilliants, and diamonds glittered on the lace and satin gown.

The Queen possessed an agreeable voice, combined with the precious gift of knowing exactly what to say at the right moment. She never

forgot a face, or the facts she had heard about different people; and she flattered and delighted those who came in contact with her by remembering, long after, some trifle connected with them or their family. Her power of showing interest appeared inexhaustible, and each person to whom she spoke felt convinced that he or she was of individual account to Her Majesty. Marcia was asked a few kind questions in extraordinarily good English, and then the King and Queen passed into the ballroom amid renewed curtsyings and salutes.

'Thank goodness that is over!' Grete remarked with a sigh of relief, as they hastened out of the Red Salon, and made their way to the end of the ballroom, where a large group of officers was standing. At the opposite end, commanding a view over the whole room, was a long platform wreathed in flowers. On this the King and Queen and the other members of the royal family were seated.

The band struck up a waltz, which was led by the Crown Prince and Princess and the lesser Royalties. Gradually other couples joined in; but they all danced the so-called 'Court Valse,' —a stiff two-step which Marcia thought very antiquated.

'Will you try it?' Herr von Megersdorf asked. 'In the next room the usual waltz is allowed. Here we must dance with our swords on, and be fearfully careful not to run into any of the couples.'

'I think we will go into the other room,' Marcia said; and with a sigh of relief her partner unbuckled his sword, which he put with a rapidly

increasing stack in a corner, and laid his feathered helmet by its side.

The second room was considerably smaller, with an atrocious brown paper on the walls; but the floor was irreproachable, and Marcia gave herself up to the enjoyment of an excellent partner, a magnificent band, and space to dance comfortably.

'Why do they dance that horrid two-step instead of a proper waltz?' she asked Megersdorf.

'So that the princesses, who don't know how to waltz, shall not display their ignorance, I have been told,' he replied. 'The Crown Princess, who dances beautifully and is passionately fond of it, never has the two-step at her balls.'

Marcia stopped a moment to rest, but immediately two or three officers darted from the group at the door, and the first on the spot bowed to her and to Megersdorf, and danced off with her. Eberhard von Kleister, a young Artillery lieutenant whose chief sorrow was that, despite all his efforts, he had failed to grow a moustache, and was therefore not so popular with the ladies as his more fortunate comrades, found to his delight that this was no disadvantage in the eyes of the English Mees. In the course of their conversation it transpired that it was quite the fashion in England for men to be clean shaven. He looked at her in amazement. 'Here in Germany,' he said, 'only parsons and actors are clean shaved, and I have known an actor who preferred to pay fifty marks penalty rather than lose his moustache.'

As long as the music played, Marcia found it impossible to rest: the moment she stopped there was another partner bowing in front of her, and it did not appear to be etiquette to refuse any one. There were no signs of chairs except for the royal party, and in the Red Salon, so in the intervals Marcia stood with her back to the wall, and a circle of young officers round her.

'At English balls,' she informed them, 'we have sitting-out places, where you can rest between the dances, or as long as you like.'

'We can sit out too at most dances,' Herr von Kleister said. 'There are rows of chairs all round the ballroom as a rule.'

'That's not what we should call "sitting-out" in England,' Marcia replied; and she went on to describe the little corners and nooks provided for the couples at an English ball. Her description was greeted with exclamations of amazement; and the possibilities of such opportunity flashed across the mind of each lieutenant. They all knew what would be the result if such screened recesses were provided for them and the noble young ladies, who, notwithstanding their restrictions and chaperoning, managed to make the most of the few opportunities they stole.

'Here, Herr von Brösewick,' Baron Hennig called. 'You are such a devoted admirer of "Old England"; come and hear what the English Mees tells us of their balls.' Otto von Brösewick, who was passing with Baroness Elsa on his arm, joined the group.

'Gnädiges Fräulein says that they have little screened-off corners where couples can sit tête-à-

tête, instead of dancing, if they choose. What do you think of that, Baroness?'

Elsa giggled, and cast an arch glance round the group of lieutenants. It said quite plainly: 'What a good time we should have, if that were the fashion here!'

'Really, I don't know,' she tittered, looking down at her Cambridge blue skirt. 'I think it sounds very dangerous.'

'Ah, but your Englishmen care for nothing but sport,' Baron Hennig exclaimed contemptuously. 'I expect they sit in one of these little nooks, with a charming Mees, and only talk of their "football-sport" or their "tennis-sport." I have a friend who went to England, and he told me if you cannot talk of "sport," no one will speak to you.'

'And everything is "shocking,"' Leutnant von Hildebrandt declared. 'You say something pleasant to an English Mees, and she cries "Ow now!" and is "shocking."'

'And my friend says,' Baron Hennig interrupted, 'that in England the gentlemen put their feet on the salon chairs and smoke pipes.'

'How awful?' Baroness Elsa cried in horror.

'Please to engage for the *Française*,' Graf Halms-Halms called from the end of the room.

'I have another tale to tell of what happened to my friend in "Old England,"' Baron Hennig remarked. 'I will recount it at supper.'

'Yes, we have already arranged the table; we all sit together,' Otto von Brösewick said, as they separated to find places for the quadrille.

Marcia's partner was a Freiherr von Seltenstein,

formerly adjutant in a Grenadier regiment, a man of considerable ability, whose ambition was to qualify for the General Staff, and to quit Waldberg for Berlin. He was studying Russian in his spare time, and insisted upon practising his English upon Marcia.

'We are told in my country,' she remarked, during an interval between the intricate figures of the quadrille, 'that all Germans can speak English; but I have not found this the case at all.'

'No, it is not so in our circles,' Her von Seltenstein replied. 'Among business men and professors, you will find most of them can speak English, but of course they don't count socially.'

'How surprising!' Marcia exclaimed. 'We look upon Germany as a nation of professors, and yet you tell me they don't count.'

'Of course they count in their own class, and from the point of view of *Wissenschaft*, but unless they have some high post, or are *adelig*, they would not be invited to Court functions, nor should we receive them as our equals.'

'What strikes me,' Marcia remarked, having accomplished the advancings and retirings and the profound curtsies of the next figure, 'is the way every class is divided off in Germany. Now in a London drawing-room you meet all sorts of people, and with lots of them you don't even know, or care, what they do.'

'That would be impossible with us,' von Seltenstein responded. 'The first thing you do when you meet a man is to inquire what he is

and what he does, and then what his father was and did. If the replies are satisfactory, you know him.'

'In England, if a man is a gentleman, and nice, he can do what he likes. It does not concern others what he does, provided it is not dishonourable,' Marcia responded.

'In Germany you can only take up work which is *standesgemäss*, that is, not beneath you,' von Seltenstein replied. 'If you belong to the nobility you must choose between the Army and the Law.'

'But both those professions require money and do not make it,' Marcia remarked, as the dance ended. Seltenstein offered her his arm and led her to the side of the room. 'What do you do if you are poor and want to make money?'

'Most of the German nobility are poor,' her partner said. 'Since the Franco-Prussian War they have been terribly crippled and reduced. Our grandmothers and mothers gave even their wedding-rings to the War Fund, and denuded themselves of everything. It is the proud privilege of their sons to serve their country and their Kaiser.'

'It must cost far less to be in a German crack regiment than in a British one,' Marcia remarked.

'Of course our families pinch and scrape so that their sons can enter the Army,' von Seltenstein explained. 'We call it "the brilliant misery." People who see the show and the magnificent position of the officers in Germany

seldom realise the rigid self-denials and economies that are practised at home.'

'Seltenstein is delivering one of his lectures to the English Mees,' Hennig remarked to Otto von Brösewick.

'Yes, do you remember the time he cornered poor little Countess Armgarde von der Elbe—I beg her pardon, I mean Gräfin Radwitz—and insisted upon explaining *Kriegspiel* to her?'

'By the way, have you heard that Graf Max has gone to see about a post as land-agent in some little hole?' Hennig asked.

'I heard that he and the beautiful Suzanna have left Waldberg together, and are already married,' Otto von Brösewick announced.

Hennig whistled softly. 'Well, his brother will never speak to him again. He has done for himself. Why the devil was he such a fool as to marry her?'

'Suzanna is no fool herself,' von Brösewick replied. 'She was determined not to fritter away her best years and then be chucked on one side when her looks were gone. Probably the only way Radwitz could get her was by becoming her husband.'

Hennig, feeling convinced that Brösewick spoke from personal experience, thought this was probably the right explanation. 'The young Gräfin Radwitz does not look as if matrimony had agreed very well with her,' he remarked. 'I have never seen her so pale before—all the colour seems to have gone into her nose and the rims of her eyes.'

'And the colour of the other young ladies

into their backs and arms,' Otto von Brösewick whispered, pointing to Baroness Elsa, whose red shoulders glowed above the fringe of crude forget-me-nots. 'The English Mees is the only one who keeps cool.'

'That is because all the English have iced water in their veins instead of blood.' He was at a loss to understand the lack of appreciation Marcia displayed towards his fascinations, and felt that it must be owing to some temperamental deficiency. 'Here she is,' he continued, as Marcia came up with little Leutnant von Engelsberg, who barely reached up to her shoulders, and, like many small men, made up in self-conceit what he lacked in stature. 'Ah, gnädiges Fräulein, I was just saying, you English are so cold. My friend tells me if an English son sees his father after years of separation, he only says, "Aw, how-do-you-do, papa?" but no embraces and no signs of joy. It seems if a man saves your life and has not been introduced, you will not speak to him.'

Marcia laughed. 'I know that is the idea foreigners have about us,' she replied. 'But my experience is that you are more particular about introducing than we are. For instance, in the square dances here, if by any chance you don't know all of the couples, you immediately introduce yourself and your partner. In England we don't care if we haven't been introduced to any one.'

'Really?' Engelsberg drawled. 'But then you don't know the names of the other people in your *Carré*.'

'Look! Look at the elephant!' Baron Hennig exclaimed. Marcia turned and saw Gertrude von Reydorf pounding down the room, with a miserable little officer clinging helplessly round her stalwart body.

'No, really, she should be shut up now,' Brösewick declared. 'The whole room shakes when she dances, and look whom she has caught.'

'Poor little man, he seems rather inadequate,' Marcia remarked. 'But what a pretty uniform he has on!'

'Pretty!' they all exclaimed in horror. 'You call that pretty!' Hennig cried. 'Why, it is the *Train*! Nobody but a *Train* will dance with the Reydorf, and they only do so because nobody else will dance with them.'

Otto von Brösewick bowed and clicked his heels together. 'Gnädiges Fräulein, we must not miss this waltz, and you dance so divinely that no moment must be lost.'

Marcia was more than ready to comply. She found that the officers' dancing possessed all the qualities which their conversation lacked, and their undisguised enthusiasm on the subject pleased her. It was a surprising thing, she thought, that the men danced so well and the girls so extraordinarily badly. She watched Grete von Heller clutching her partner's arm, her crimped head bobbing up and down, and her large feet thumping the ground, out of time with the music. Baroness Elsa had a satin loop on her tulle skirt, by which she held it up, displaying a frill of cheap lace, and stockings which

she fondly imagined matched her dress. Erna von Holtz placed her hand on her partner's shoulder—this, she informed her friends, was the latest fashion—and held her head affectedly on one side, while she occasionally cast backward glances at the cerise draperies which floated behind her.

Marcia was beginning to feel she could stand no longer, when Graf Halms-Halms announced that supper was ready, and a general scrimmage for partners ensued.

'It is terrible,' Gertrude von Reydorf whispered miserably. 'Nobody has engaged me for supper. I don't know what I shall do. Don't leave me standing here all alone.'

'Gnädiges Fräulein, we must find our table now,' Baron Hennig exclaimed, drawing Marcia away.

'Wait a minute. Fräulein von Reydorf hasn't a partner. Can't you find her one?' she said good-naturedly.

The unfortunate Gertrude looked gratefully at the English Mees, but Hennig shrugged his shoulders.

'There is quite a crowd of officers over there,' Marcia continued. 'Go and ask them if they are all engaged.'

Hennig reluctantly crossed the room, but meanwhile one of the despised *Train* lieutenants, thankful to secure any lady, came up and bowed before Fräulein von Reydorf, who, with feelings of mingled relief and disappointment, took his arm and disappeared through the door.

'Thank goodness she has gone with the *Train*!'

Baron Hennig exclaimed, returning hastily to Marcia's side. 'Strangely enough, everybody is always engaged when it is a question of the Reydorf.'

He hurried Marcia across the now empty *Ballsaal* and into a small room, which from its odd shape she inferred must be in one of the palace towers. There was only space for a single table, at which two seats remained vacant, those reserved for Hennig and his *Tischdame*. They were greeted with cries of 'At last' from the rest of the assembly, and Hennig gave an account — which he considered most humorous —of the Reydorf's dilemma and her eventual capture by the *Train*.

Leutnant von Engelsberg was sitting on Marcia's left, with Baroness Elsa, who appeared to find him very attractive, on the other side. Apparently, Marcia reflected, German girls do not mind what size their cavaliers may be, provided they have sufficiently large moustaches. Opposite, von Brösewick was holding forth to Hertha von Arnsperg. She looked ill at ease, and was convinced the English Mees would glare at her every time she raised her glass to her lips. 'Horrid conceited creature!' she thought. 'How I dislike her, and how I wish she hadn't seen me that evening at the Bazaar! It is vile to be looked down upon by an English Mees.'

At the end of the table Erna von Holtz was trying to captivate Leutnant von Megersdorf, who kept his eyes fixed on Marcia and wished he were sitting next her. Erna followed the direction of his glance, and hated the English

Mees and her elegant clothes. 'Why couldn't she stop in England?' she wondered crossly. 'What cheek to come here and spoil our fun—nasty, scraggy stick!—and make us look as if we weren't smart and well dressed.' The lackeys, in their gorgeous royal liveries and cotton gloves, were handing round cups of thick white soup.

'My friend who went to England,' Hennig remarked, sucking down his soup from the point of his spoon, 'stopped with Robert Walker, Esquire, in London. Perhaps you know him, gnädiges Fräulein?'

'There are, I should think, hundreds of Walkers in London,' Marcia replied. 'What part did he live in?'

'I don't know what part. I only know it was London. My friend was taken out a great deal in the best society. He saw some very queer things.'

'What sort of things?' Marcia inquired with a smile.

'I will tell you,' Hennig said, looking round the table to see that the others were listening. 'One day he and Robert Walker, Esquire, were asked to dinner with a family of the highest aristocracy—a "Knight," I think, my friend said the gentleman was. The whole family was most cordial and kind to my friend, Herr von Rabensau, until the middle of dinner, when all of a sudden they appeared turned into stone, did not answer his remarks, and only glared in horror at my poor friend.'

'What had happened?' Brösewick inquired.

'I suppose he hadn't said he had ever shot a fox?'

'Good heavens! no,' Baron Hennig replied. 'That is an old *faux pas*, which he would never have made. He could not imagine what he had done, and directly after dinner Robert Walker, Esquire, hurried him away. The terrible sin poor Herr von Rabensau had committed was to use a fork when he ought to have used a knife, or a knife when it should have been a fork. The English, his friend assured him, will forgive your stealing and swindling, but they will never forgive a mistake in table manners. It is the unpardonable sin in Old England.'

Hennig glanced round the table to see what effect this extraordinary anecdote had created. There was a chorus of '*Ach neins!*' from the noble young ladies, who looked extremely scornful, and eyed Marcia with augmented disfavour for belonging to a nation with such hysterical ideas.

'The ladies in England always take brandy at their "Fife o'clock,"' Engelsberg drawled. 'There was an English lady of the aristocracy staying at the Pension at Grindelwald last year, and she had a brandy-bottle on her tea-tray. When Frau Meier, who kept the Pension, said something about it, the Mees told her all the ladies of the English "High Life" drink brandy with their tea.'

'I think she was slightly misinformed,' Marcia remarked; 'just as we in England think that Germans live entirely upon sausages, beer, and *Sauerkraut*, and always wear spectacles and a beard.'

'No, really, do they imagine that?' Baron Hennig cried, thinking what a revelation the smart and polished officers must be to these ignorant Britishers.

'These fish come from the royal lake at Hellenau,' Otto von Brösewick informed Marcia.

'Yes, awfully good, aren't they?' Engelsberg exclaimed, rubbing a piece of bread round and round his plate in order not to lose a drop of the mussel sauce.

'We must do justice to the royal champagne,' Hennig declared, as the lackeys filled up the glasses.

'I only touch wine when I feel faint or have a bad headache,' Hertha proclaimed in a loud voice. 'I hate wine as a rule.' She glanced across at Marcia: perhaps the English Mees would now think that she had suffered from a fainting-fit at the Bazaar.

'I suppose everybody has heard that Graf Max Radwitz has taken a post as land-agent at Fischbach?' Baron Hennig asked.

'No! How can he degrade himself by becoming anything as common as an agent?' Herr von Engelsberg cried in disgust. 'We shall soon have the nobility going in for trade.' Engelsberg's widowed mother and sister lived in a back street in Essen. They had no servant, and only ate meat twice a week, in order that their dear Freddy might be in a crack Waldberg regiment.

'Delicious, the wine sauce to this *Schinken*!' Baron Hennig said. 'I suppose Graf von Rühlheim won't touch ham now? He is training

for the future.' There was a roar of laughter at this sally, which Uli, who was sitting at the other end of the table with Sophie von Holtz, failed to understand. When at last his slow wits grasped its meaning, he blushed violently.

Down the middle of the table were dishes filled with little packets of chocolate, crackers, and small souvenirs, wrapped in covers decorated with portraits of the King and Queen, and the Waldberg royal arms. These were snatched as souvenirs of the ball and secreted in pockets, where they were squashed out of recognition before the evening was over.

The last item on the programme was the cotillion. Everybody assembled in the *Ballsaal*, and formed into a huge semicircle in front of the royal dais. The band struck up, and a pyramid of gorgeous flowers was wheeled into the middle of the room by several lackeys. Graf Haussonville handed bouquets to the royal party, who danced once round and then returned to their seats. The rest of the flowers were distributed among the ladies, and the couples struggled round the room in the awkward two-step, hampered by swords, helmets, and bouquets. A variety of figures followed, in all of which flowers played the prominent part. One after another the lieutenants came up to Marcia, bowed and presented her with a bouquet, which entitled each one to a few turns round the room with her. As in a short time she had more flowers than she could hold, she begged Herr von Seltenstein to pile them up in a sequestered corner, until the cotillion was over.

'It is an extraordinary thing,' she remarked to him in the interval between two figures, 'that everybody here seems to be in the Army. I have been looking round, and the only people who are wearing Court dress seem to be those few old Ministers.'

'Nearly everybody of family is an officer in the reserve,' von Seltenstein replied, 'if he isn't in the active Army; and as the royal commands are that all who are entitled to wear uniform should do so, there are very few who appear as civilians.'

Here a miniature wood, with a huge toadstool sprouting out of brilliant green moss, was wheeled into the circle. Suddenly there was a report, the erection flew to pieces, and underneath, a bank of the most exquisite flowers was visible. There were exclamations of delight, and the officers crowded round to secure as many bouquets as possible.

'For gnädiges Fräulein, the flower of love,' Baron Hennig murmured sentimentally, handing Marcia a huge spray of perfect *La France* roses.

'Look at the quantity of flowers the English Mees has got,' Hertha von Arnsperg whispered angrily. 'I shall be furious if she gets more than we.'

'I could have had as many if I had liked,' Sophie responded. 'But my chilblains hurt so much, I can't dance.'

Hertha cast a sceptical glance at her companion. She herself was suffering acutely from tight shoes and a bad corn, but she would have

hobbled round thankfully with any one who had given her a bouquet.

'Hush! The cotillion is over. The royal party are rising,' Herr von Seltenstein whispered to Marcia. The King and Queen descended from the dais, and amid deep curtsies and salutes walked slowly round the circle, stopping frequently to speak to their more favoured subjects. This ceremony seemed to last an interminable time. Every one had to stand immovable while the royal couple made the round. At last, to Marcia's infinite relief, their Majesties, accompanied by the other royalties, passed into the Red Salon, while the ladies swept to the ground in an exhausted and final curtsy.

'I am so sorry, Gnädiges Fräulein; your flowers have gone!' Seltenstein exclaimed, after searching vainly on every side for Marcia's trophies.

'They must have been taken away by mistake some time ago,' Sophie von Holtz declared officiously. 'They were gone when I came here.'

Marcia cast one glance at the mass of bouquets which Sophie was grasping in both hands, and immediately recognised a bunch of Parma violets which Brösewick had given her. She turned away without replying, and taking Seltenstein's arm, joined the Gräfin, who was hurriedly looking round for her.

'Come, Mees, we must go now. It is terribly late; I believe it is already half-past one,' she exclaimed. As German balls usually finish punctually at twelve o'clock, this was considered a most dissipated hour.

In the cloakroom the noble young ladies were comparing their spoils.

'Well, Sophie, who would have thought you had been presented with so many bouquets?' they all exclaimed, eyeing the younger Fräulein von Holtz suspiciously.

'And why not?' she remarked pertly, with a hasty glance at Marcia, who was assisting the Gräfin to struggle into her wraps. 'I suppose one may have admirers even if one doesn't come from "Old England."'

'Thank you, Mees, you are very kind,' the Gräfin said, as she slipped her brooches into the little bag. 'Uli will be waiting for us in the hall, and we must get the carriage as soon as possible.'

Outside the cloakroom the officers in their gray overcoats were standing grouped together, while the ladies were talking eagerly, muffled in their hideous wraps, their skirts pinned up disclosing goloshes and snow-boots.

Baron Hennig and Herr von Megersdorf came up, bestowing appreciative glances on Marcia's dainty cloak.

'It has been a delightful evening,' Megersdorf said. 'The next time we meet will, I suppose, be at the ball of the Commanding General.'

'Yes. Gnädiges Fräulein will give me the supper dance again?' Hennig exclaimed.

'The carriage of the Frau Gräfin von Rühlheim-Hochburg!' the lackey called from the steps; and amid nods and bows the Gräfin, followed by Marcia and Uli, climbed into the musty vehicle, and immediately fell asleep in her corner.

CHAPTER XV

THE Court ball was followed closely by all the lesser functions which had to be crowded into the short time before Carnival. Marcia danced most evenings of the week, but, as the balls were over soon after twelve, she experienced little of the wear and tear attendant upon similar dissipations in her native country.

One bright, frosty morning when she was walking in the square facing the Palace, she ran into a knot of the *Kranz* friends, who were standing under one of the bare trees, talking excitedly. In the ordinary course of events they would merely have nodded, and let the English Mees pass without further sign of recognition. To-day, however, they were garrulous with excitement, and eager for any audience to whom they could impart their news.

'Ah, Mees, have you heard what has happened?' Erna von Holtz exclaimed as Marcia came up.

'No, I have heard nothing particular.'

'Otto von Brösewick has had to leave Waldberg hurriedly, and will never come back again,' Erna cried.

'Why has he done that?' Marcia inquired, turning up the collar of her fur coat, and looking round at the red faces of the group. She knew

from their delighted expressions that something scandalous must have occurred.

'Imagine!' Baroness Elsa cried. 'He had a love-affair with Frau Hoffmann!'

'You know, the Hoffmanns who have the big furniture shop in the Löwestrasse,' Hertha interrupted.

'I wish you would let me tell the thing,' Erna von Holtz exclaimed impatiently. 'I was the first to hear about it, so I have the first right.'

'Well, I was his *Tischdame* at the Court ball, so I have a special interest in him,' Hertha declared sentimentally.

'Nonsense! we all had an interest in him,' Grete von Heller retorted, 'but that has nothing to do with the affair. Erna, if you are going to tell it, hurry up.'

'Well, it seems, this love-affair had been going on for ages,' Erna resumed with gusto. 'Hoffmann travelled about a great deal all over Germany to pick up valuable pieces of furniture, and during his absence Brösewick amused himself with his wife.'

'Who is a very handsome woman,' Sophie von Holtz interjected; 'and Herr von Brösewick had known her before she was married, when she was at Müllers, the confectioner's.

'Yes, he used to go and eat dozens of cream puffs, so that he could flirt with her over the counter,' Hertha added.

'Well, matters progressed splendidly,' Erna continued, 'and nobody knew anything about it until the awful crash came last night. The husband had gone off on some of his travels, and

Otto went to visit his lady-love after the ball at the Minister of Finance's house. Suddenly, in the middle of it all'—Erna waved her arm comprehensively—'they heard steps on the staircase, and before they could do anything, the door flew open, and the husband stood on the threshold.' She paused dramatically, and her audience, although they had heard it before, breathed heavily.

'What did the husband do?' Marcia asked.

'Wait; the awful part of the story is coming,' Erna continued impressively. 'The husband, who is a huge man, as tall as Graf Radwitz and twice his width, called Brösewick some awful names, and seizing hold of him by his collar, flung him out of the door and kicked him down the stairs.'

'The best thing he could do!' Marcia exclaimed in disgust.

The noble young ladies looked amazed. 'What? To treat an officer in such a manner?' Baroness Elsa cried indignantly. 'Don't you see, Herr von Brösewick can't fight Hoffmann, who is not capable of giving him satisfaction, and as he can't clear himself of the insult by a duel, his honour has been taken from him, and he is done for.'

Marcia shook her head. 'I don't understand that at all,' she remarked. It seems to me the other way round altogether. It is Hoffman who has received the insult, and the dishonour of making love to another man's wife is surely greater than that of being kicked downstairs by the husband.'

The members of the *Kranz* looked horrified at this speech.

'Of course as you are English you don't under-

stand these things,' Erna observed tolerantly. 'I have heard that you have no rigid ideas of honour at all.'

'We have certainly not the same ideas,' Marcia replied, and knowing that all further argument would be useless, she nodded to the girls and continued her walk. The thought of what she had just heard filled her mind. Those nasty little beasts, she reflected, must have got hold of the wrong end of the story. She must find out what really had occurred, but she knew it would be useless to ask the Gräfin, who was far too vague, and who never took the slightest interest in scandals.

That evening, at the Prime Minister's ball, Marcia was greatly relieved when Herr von Seltenstein asked for the privilege of taking her in to supper. She thought him far more interesting than the other officers, and was glad that he treated her as a person capable of appreciating conversation not solely confined to food and compliments.

Supper was laid at long tables in one room, and the noise was deafening. Marcia realised for the first time the immense volume of the German voice and the loud tone in which conversations are conducted.

'How extraordinarily young some of your officers look,' she remarked, glancing down the table.

'They are too young, some of them, and that I consider a fault of our system,' he replied. 'The sons of officers are received in the Cadet Schools at a ridiculously low charge, which

includes everything, even their uniforms. If they are the sons of officers' widows, the charge is almost nominal. The Cadet Schools receive them from the age of ten, and it is incredible how many are sent at that age.'

'I have seen the poor little babies in the town,' Marcia remarked, 'with hardly enough room on their minute persons for all the buttons on their uniforms. One I saw who didn't look more than seven. He was saluting all the officers like a solemn automaton, when he ought to have been trundling his hoop in charge of a nurse.'

'Though it seems a cruel thing to subject them so young to such rigid military discipline,' Seltenstein said, 'you cannot be surprised that they are sent at the earliest possible age. Take the hundreds of officers' families in Germany who are so poor that they are obliged to practise an economy which you would hardly believe, if I told you how far it extended. They belong to the *Offizierstand*, the class which, above all others, is looked up to in this country, and they must keep up appearances at all costs. The husband cannot go about in a shabby uniform, so the wife turns her old dress for the sixth time, and makes her supper off lentil soup instead of meat.'

'And what about the children?' Marcia inquired. 'Can't they take up some more lucrative profession?'

'No, they must not adopt any profession which is not *standesgemäss*, and being the sons of officers, they must become officers too. As many parents could not afford to put their sons into the Army in the ordinary course of events, the State pro-

vides the Cadet Schools, and takes the responsibility and most of the cost of education off the parents' hands.'

'Of course our boys go very young to preparatory schools,' Marcia remarked. 'But I expect they don't have such a hard time as the cadets. Have they plenty of games at the Cadet Schools?'

'They have no games at all, but they have drill, gymnastics, and walking. From the time they enter, they are under rigid military discipline, with absolutely no independence, and never more money in their possession than a few pence.'

'And I suppose even for the poor little babies of ten there is no woman to look after them if they are ill or unhappy?'

'Good heavens, no! If they are ill, they are put into the hospital ward. There is of course a doctor on the staff of the Cadet Houses. The staff consists of officers picked from various regiments to give the cadets their instruction.'

'And when do the boys leave the Cadet Schools?' Marcia asked.

'If a cadet has behaved well, and has gone through the course satisfactorily, he can be a lieutenant in his regiment at the age of eighteen. He then makes a jump from the penniless condition and strict supervision of the *Kadettenhaus*, to liberty and—what he considers—opulence. He has never handled money in his life, and the first pay he gets as a lieutenant seems a fortune to him—which he probably squanders in the most foolish manner. I am convinced that many of the cases of debt in which our young officers get entangled

are owing to this system, and debt is often the prelude to a ruined career.'

'By the way,' Marcia exclaimed with sudden resolution, 'there is one thing I want to ask you about. I know you will think it unusual for me to talk to you on such a subject, but remember I am English, and I want to understand certain things which appear incomprehensible to us.'

'Gnädiges Fräulein, do you imagine that I usually talk to the young girls of my own country as I have been speaking to you? If I were to discuss the education of cadets with them, instead of admiring their finery, they would consider me the greatest bore on the face of the earth.' He smiled at her with his nice blue eyes, the only good feature in his face. 'If there is anything I can explain to you, gnädiges Fräulein, I shall be delighted to do so.'

Marcia hesitated. 'It is about Herr von Brösewick,' she said, glancing at her companion. He frowned, and looked gloomily down at his plate.

'A miserable affair,' he said curtly, 'which one must resent most deeply, for it brings discredit on our beloved Army, and on the whole *Offizierstand*.'

'I have heard the facts of the case in a roundabout way,' Marcia continued. 'But I was told that the dishonour to Herr von Brösewick lay in the fact, not that he was making love to somebody else's wife, but that he was kicked downstairs by the husband. That point of view I fail to understand, and I thought perhaps you could explain it to me.'

Seltenstein reflected a moment. 'Of course it is a most reprehensible thing to carry on an intrigue with a married woman,' he said at last; 'but according to our ideas the chief dishonour lies in the fact that the woman's husband, as a common man, is not *satisfactionsfähig*: that is, he is not capable of giving or receiving satisfaction, as no gentleman can fight him. If Brösewick had made love to the wife of a man in his own circle, the man would have challenged him to a duel, and whatever the result, the injury would have been wiped out, and Brösewick would have retained his honour.'

Marcia knitted her brows. 'I cannot agree with that point of view at all,' she remarked, shaking her head. 'I still don't understand why it seemed to fill people with so much horror that the husband kicked Herr von Brösewick downstairs—surely the most natural thing for him to do.'

'You see, gnädiges Fräulein,' von Seltenstein explained, 'we have the most rigid ideas about honour. An officer must keep his uniform unsullied, or he must abjure it for ever. For example, suppose an officer in uniform is sitting in a café, and some common lout knocks up against his chair intentionally, or offers him any insult, he has no option but to leave the Army. He has allowed the King's uniform to be insulted, without the possibility of avenging it by a duel, and his honour has been taken from him.'

'I should be sorry if my honour were such a perishable thing, at the mercy of any casual lout

who chose to take it,' Marcia observed. 'But what will happen to Herr von Brösewick now?'

Seltenstein shrugged his shoulders. 'As he cannot avenge his honour by a duel, he is *entehrt*, and if he remained in Germany he would be a social outcast. No decent person would speak to him.'

'Where do you suppose he will go, then?' Marcia asked.

'Probably to America,' Seltenstein answered. 'There are hundreds of cases of wrecked existences in our Army, officers who, as we say, "have gone round the corner." There is no place or hope for them afterwards in Germany, so they all flock to America, where nobody knows or cares what their past history has been, and where they hope to amass a fortune. Needless to say, few do that, but I believe there is an hotel in New York where all the waiters are ex-officers from the German Army.'

'What an awful thing it seems,' Marcia said. 'Here they are pampered and flattered; everybody looks up to them, and they are regarded as the cream of creation. There they have to work as common menials, or starve as outcasts. What is usually the cause of their ruin?'

Seltenstein shrugged his shoulders. 'Various things; debts very often. As I said before, these young cubs come out of the Cadet Houses and squander their money absolutely recklessly, enjoying life for the first time. Of course they get into debt, and don't know what to do. Then some Jew money-lender gets hold of them, and lends them money at exorbitant interest. Pro-

bably they fall more and more into his power, until he suddenly draws the string, and then there is no option for them but a bullet through the head or the next boat for America.'

'You certainly do hate the Jews in Germany,' Marcia observed.

'Hate them! We loathe the brutes,' Seltenstein exclaimed hotly. 'They would suck the very blood out of our veins if they could. I had a cousin, a light-hearted, inexperienced boy, who, after he first joined his regiment, fell into the clutches of a Jew. This fiendish old Israelite, with his wiles and ingenuity, got my poor cousin entirely into his power, until he held even their family property in his hands. Poor Adalbert, who could not face his widowed mother, was found dead one morning with a bullet through his brain. He was only eighteen.'

'It seems terrible,' Marcia said, 'but surely your nation is a little to blame for this state of affairs. You hound the Jews out of everything. You will not allow them to take up any decent profession, so what is left for them to do?'

'*Prosit*, gnädiges Fräulein!' a voice exclaimed, and for the first time Marcia saw that Baron Hennig was seated a little way down the opposite side of the table.

'Baroness Elsa and I have been trying to attract your attention,' he cried, shouting at the top of his voice, in an attempt to penetrate the deafening din which was going on around them. 'But you and Herr von Seltenstein were so immersed in your conversation that you would not look at us.'

After they had crowded out of the stifling dining-room at the termination of supper, Marcia found Baron Hennig at her elbow. 'So the cold English Mees has succumbed at last,' he whispered spitefully. 'Though you were quite unconscious of your surroundings, I was watching you the whole time, and I saw how absorbed you and your companion were in one another. The cultured Herr von Seltenstein is not, it appears, satisfied with his *Kriegspiel* and his studies; he must also capture the heart of the English Mees.'

'Herr von Seltenstein is one of the few officers I have met whose conversation does not consist of personal commonplaces,' Marcia replied, moveing on.

'I suppose he was explaining his book on tactics?' Hennig continued; then, changing his tone, he looked at Marcia sentimentally, and said with a sigh: 'If only gnädiges Fräulein would show as much interest in my conversation.'

Marcia thought of the talk dignified by that name which had taken place at the supper of the Court ball, and smiled.

'Well, the rest of your acquaintance make up for my lack of taste, I am sure,' she remarked; 'and you can always account for my peculiarities by remembering that, after all, I am only a mad *Engländerin*.'

CHAPTER XVI

THE question of costumes for Carnival was filling the minds of Waldberg society, and all the shop-windows were crowded with masks, and gaudy, cheap materials.

'I think of going as "Summer,"' the Gräfin remarked to Marcia. 'Marie can make the dress out of the robes I wore at the Oriental Bazaar, and I see Krebs has got artificial roses at twenty-five pfennig the dozen. I could have three or four dozen of those sewed all over the costume, and a wreath of them in my hair. What have you selected, Mees?'

Marcia was turning over a pile of coloured plates, and wondering whether she would look more atrocious in orange skirts as the *Woche* newspaper, or in the hackneyed costume of a Swiss peasant.

'I really don't know,' she said. 'None of these drawings look a bit pretty.'

'Why don't you go as "Spring"?' the Gräfin suggested. 'You can get some lovely bright green satin at Krebs's for forty pfennigs a yard, and Marie would run up the skirt for you.'

'Thank you very much,' Marcia said. 'But I think I shall write home and get a friend to send me out the costume I had for a fancy-dress ball in London.'

'That will be much the best,' the Gräfin assented. 'Then you will save buying anything here. We have two invitations for Carnival-Tuesday, but I think we will only go to the von Holtzes. Their rooms are very big, and they have open house that evening. You must not forget that you must get a mask, and when you go shopping, will you ask Elsa von Dörring to accompany you? Her mother is not well, and will not allow Elsa to go out alone.'

Accordingly, in due course, Marcia found herself outside the Dörrings' house, and reluctantly asked for the Baroness Elsa. The latter, who had been cooking cakes, hastily changed her blue cotton apron for one of pink silk with satin bows, and seizing upon a volume of Lessing, hurried into the salon to greet her visitor.

'How do you do, Mees?' she said. 'I was just in the midst of reading "Emilia Galotti," and was so immersed that I did not even hear the bell.'

'What a superfluous fib!' Marcia thought, noticing the flour on the noble young lady's finger-nails. 'The Grafin asked me to call for you,' she said, 'as she thought you might care to go shopping with me.'

Elsa beamed. 'How very kind!' she exclaimed effusively. 'Mamma is unwell, and she is so particular that I am not allowed to go to the end of the street alone. Would you like to come into my little sanctum while I put on my things?'

Marcia assented, and Elsa led the way to a

slip of a room, which opened into the sleeping apartment of the youthful baroness. The drab walls were covered all over with picture-post-cards, unframed 'snapshots,' cotillion favours, and faded bunches of flowers, fixed on with pins. Two gimcrack painted stands were crowded with *Nippsachen* — cheap little ornaments of every sort and description — vases entwined with pink china roses, and china figures of officers and students. A poker-work-stool and table and three shabby chairs completed the furniture of this apartment, round which the owner looked with evident pride.

'This is quite my own,' she remarked. 'Perhaps you will wait a moment. I shall be ready directly.'

The room was both stuffy and cold; the rusty iron stove looked as if it were never used, and the window as if it were never opened. Marcia sighed with relief when Baroness Elsa appeared in an ancient fur tippet and cap, with her hands tucked into a shabby little muff.

'I must get a mask,' Marcia said when they were in the street. 'Perhaps you will take me to the best shop.'

'Oh, you can get that anywhere,' Elsa replied. 'But we will go to Krebs's; I want to see some blue spangled tulle they have at fifteen pfennig the metre. It is the greatest shame; mamma says I must wear the costume I had for the Oriental Bazaar, and everybody will recognise me at once.'

'What is Carnival like?' Marcia inquired.

'Do you mean to say you have not got *Fast-*

nacht in your country?' Elsa cried in amazement. She only knew one redeeming feature about England, and that was the provision of secreted nooks at English balls.

'Of course we have fancy-dress balls, and I have been to Carnival in other places. But I gather it is not the same as Carnival here.'

'Oh, Carnival is colossal!' Elsa exclaimed enthusiastically. 'It is the one time of the year when we girls can really enjoy ourselves. Everybody goes mad and gets what we call "Carnival fever," even the mammas, who of course dress up too. You can't recognise any one, and get teased and kissed and called "*Du*" by the men. It is just heavenly!' The youthful Baroness became quite pink at the thought of all the joys in store for her.

'Even worse than the Oriental Bazaar,' Marcia reflected; and then a mental vision of Excellenz von Hauken, in a fancy costume, with Carnival fever, being teased and kissed, rose before her eyes.

'It will certainly be a novel experience for me,' she said.

'Yes, and you must not get annoyed, whatever they do,' Elsa informed her patronisingly. 'It is fatal to appear angry, and you must remember that at *Fastnacht* people have a right to behave as they like.'

'How long does this go on?' Marcia asked.

'Oh, they are having big public Carnival balls now, but the real *Fastnacht*, when there is all the fun I have been telling you about, is on the Tuesday before Ash-Wednesday. The Holtzes

have open house, and all their friends come disguised, and dance and enjoy themselves till twelve o'clock.

Arrived at Krebs's shop, Marcia chose a black satin mask with a lace curtain, but suspected that, despite this, she would be recognised immediately. She also provided herself with several large bags of confetti. Baroness Elsa, who thought that a few yards of the spangled tulle wrapped round her person would give a different aspect to the Bazaar costume, was infuriated to find that the material cost twenty-five instead of fifteen pfennigs a metre, and, having failed to beat the attendant down a penny, sailed out of the shop in a rage.

'It is a shame!' she ejaculated, almost in tears. 'And Krebs's is such a common shop that it ought to be thankful when the nobility patronise it.'

She looked so dejected that Marcia good-naturedly offered to lend her an Oriental scarf as a substitute. Baroness Elsa thanked her effusively. The English Mees was too kind, and she would come at once and fetch the scarf. She was evidently afraid that Marcia might regret her sudden generosity.

'Ah, Mees,' the Gräfin said, opening the door herself; 'I have another invitation for Carnival-Tuesday. The Reitweins have offered me a room with a balcony on the Königstrasse, so that we can spend the afternoon there, and see the procession and all the masks in the street.'

'How delightful!' Baroness Elsa exclaimed, rolling her eyes pathetically. 'How I envy you!

Mamma is so unwell that she probably will not be able to take me out at all.'

'Then you must join us,' the Gräfin said kindly. 'You had better come early, as I don't know what time the procession starts.'

'Thank you so much, Frau Gräfin,' Elsa replied, curtsying, and kissing the Gräfin's hand. 'I had never thought of anything so delightful.'

'Perhaps Hertha and the Hellers would like to come too,' the Gräfin suggested.

'I know the Holtzes are going to drive up and down the Königstrasse to see the fun,' Elsa said. 'So perhaps they will take the others with them.' She curtsied again and withdrew, overjoyed at having secured both the invitation and the Oriental scarf, which was broader and more brilliant than any she had seen in Krebs's emporium.

On the morning of the eventful Tuesday Marcia was awakened by siren-like hootings, loud trumpetings, and the violent banging of drums. She dressed quickly and ran into the study, which faced the street. Underneath the window a motley crowd was assembled: Red Indians with stained faces, clowns, and beggars with huge false noses. All of them were beating, banging, or blowing various instruments, which emitted deafening and hideous noises. Directly Marcia appeared they gave a triumphant yell. 'Ah, the lovely Marseea!' they screamed. 'We have brought a serenade for the beautiful English Mees! She must reward each of us with a kiss!'

They dashed into the house, and Marcia heard

them scrambling up the stairs, and beating loudly on the door of the flat.

The Gräfin appeared in the passage. 'It is only Carnival fun,' she said, smiling; then going to the door, she called through, 'It is too early to receive visitors now; you may come later.'

'Ah, exquisite Adelgunde, Poetess of Waldberg!' a hoarse voice responded. 'Open the door that we may have a sight of your lovely face! We have come to beg you on bended knees to recite us one of your glorious poems.'

'Not now. We shall see you this afternoon,' the Gräfin replied. After many grumblings and protestations the crowd clattered down the stairs and disappeared.

'I am sure that was Herr von Megersdorf,' the Gräfin said, turning to Marcia with a laugh.

'No, impossible!' she exclaimed, thinking of the deferential respect with which he always treated the Gräfin von Rühlheim-Hochburg: this creature had addressed her as 'Adelgunde,' and had used the familiar '*Du*.' If this was the beginning of Carnival-Tuesday, she wondered what the end would be.

Various calls of a similar description occurred during the morning; and, although the Gräfin's flat was off the main street, groups of masks rushed past incessantly, flinging confetti up at the windows, blowing their hooters, and shaking their rattles. Uli and Ernst had disappeared early; the Gräfin did not even know in what costumes they were masquerading, and certainly would not have recognised either had she met him.

After an early midday meal they started off for the Königstrasse.

'You must not mind, Mees, whatever happens,' the Gräfin remarked. 'No gentleman who is not of our circle will molest you. The common people find their fun among their own class. It seems as if we should reach the Königstrasse without an adventure.'

The Gräfin had barely finished speaking when, on rounding a corner, they suddenly found their path blocked by three horrible-looking tramps, whose grimy faces were encircled by stubbly beards and disfigured by huge red noses. All three were attired in disreputable rags, and their feet protruded through the holes in their boots. Marcia drew back in disgust, but one of them seized the Gräfin's arm, while the other two hemmed Marcia in on either side, and shuffled along with her.

'Well, my beautiful Marseea!' one of her persecutors cried in a hoarse voice, slipping his arm through hers, and putting his false nose close to her face. 'How is the adored icicle? Has she melted since the Prime Minister's ball?'

Marcia drew back and tried to disengage herself.

'Now, now, darling, don't be petulant!' the other tramp cried. He was small, and had a squeaky voice, and a false wart on his face. 'Thou knowest, sweet creature, thou art always so disdainful that nobody has a chance unless he is cultured and can talk in a style elevated enough for the English Mees.' The horrid creature pressed closer to her side and stroked her face caressingly.

'Do let me go,' Marcia exclaimed angrily, throwing her head back to avoid his caresses. The other tramp, however, had seized her round the waist, and held her so tightly that all struggling would have been futile.

'It is no use being angry, my little angel,' he exclaimed. 'Just keep calm and enjoy yourself. Don't glare at me with your beautiful blue English eyes. Unless you are kind to us we shall both kiss you.'

Terrified by this threat, Marcia relaxed her rigid attitude and tried to see the humour of the situation.

'Look at the exquisite Adelgunde, the Poetess of Waldberg!' he continued. 'She isn't angry. She knows how to appreciate luck when it comes her way.'

The third tramp was clasping the Gräfin's arm affectionately with one hand, and with the other was holding a disreputable cotton umbrella, full of holes, over her head. He was chattering to her in tones of bantering familiarity, and she was laughing quite coolly and happily.

'I shan't mind soon,' Marcia thought, 'and anyhow it is stupid to appear annoyed.'

'The poor darling isn't used to it, that's all,' the small tramp squeaked, pressing up closer to Marcia's side. 'They don't have Carnival, I suppose, in "Old England." But you see if she doesn't enjoy it as much as any of the other girls, though she is so superior to them all.'

They now found themselves in a seething, screaming crowd of masks who were thronging the Königstrasse. Marcia was quite glad of her

companions, who kept the mob off her and held her safely between them.

'Marseea! Marseea!' was shrieked near her, and a blinding avalanche of confetti obliterated everything for an instant.

'Here we are!' the Gräfin gasped. 'Let us get quickly inside the door.'

'*Auf wiedersehen*, my darling! we shall meet this evening,' and amid a cloud of confetti the tramps disappeared.

Marcia turned and looked at the Gräfin. Her hat was tilted rakishly on one side, confetti was sticking on to her blue veil, and the corkscrew curls were full of it. She did not, however, appear in the least disconcerted or put out.

'You see, Mees, the fun has begun,' she said, shaking out her skirt. 'Let us go upstairs. We shall have a splendid view all down the König-strasse from the Reitweins' balcony.'

'Who do you suppose those three disgusting tramps can have been?' Marcia asked, following the Gräfin, who left a trail of confetti behind her.

'I am not quite sure, but I think it was Herr von Megersdorf who was walking with me, and the other two, I imagine, were Baron Hennig and Herr von Engelsberg.'

'No?' Marcia exclaimed in amazement. 'Surely those men, who are so particular and foppish with their scented uniforms and their manicured hands, wouldn't dress themselves up in dirty, disreputable rags?'

'That is just what they would do,' the Gräfin replied. 'I have always found that the gentlemen who are most particular in ordinary life

are the ones who go to the opposite extreme at Carnival.'

Baroness Elsa, the two von Hellers, and Hertha von Arnsperg had already arrived, and were leaning over the balcony shrieking replies to a group of clowns, who were trying to climb up.

When the Gräfin and Marcia appeared, they were greeted with a storm of confetti and yells from the street.

'All hail, Poetess of Waldberg!' one of the clowns shouted. 'Thou shalt declaim one of thine entrancing odes, and I will accompany thee on my guitar. Alas that thou wilt never give us the joy of hearing thy magic verse, O most retiring Adelgunde!' He made a deep bow, and was pushed on by the crowd.

Marcia was bombarded with confetti, paper snakes, and horrible scent-squirts, while cries of her name resounded on every side. The procession and the costumes impressed her little: she had seen a far better display at the Riviera carnivals. To her, the interest of the scene lay in the personal element. It was amazing to think that these yelling, disreputable creatures were the correct, immaculate young lieutenants; and the manner in which all restrictions and etiquette were thrown overboard amazed her even more. In one of the carriages, which could only move at a foot pace, were seated Frau von Holtz, Excellenz von Hauken, Erna and Sophie. A clown had deposed the coachman and was driving, while two others were perched on the steps, with their arms affectionately round the necks of the two young ladies.

'You see, Mees,' the Gräfin explained, 'only the gentlemen wear fancy dress in the streets. We mask ourselves this evening.' All further conversation was put an end to by a tornado of confetti, and Marcia's attention was monopolised by a defensive onslaught upon two purple clowns, who were endeavouring to scale the balcony.

'My beautiful Marseea!' one of them screamed. 'I know you have loved me in silence all these months. Now I have come to reward you with a kiss.' His painted, upturned face leered at her, and for one instant Marcia imagined she recognised Uli's features under the disguise; but this seemed impossible, and as the clown appeared to have every intention of carrying out his threat, she waited until he opened his mouth for another sally, and then flung a handful of confetti straight down his throat. There were chokings and sneezings and muffled curses, and the purple figure dropped back baffled into the crowd.

'That shows,' Marcia said to herself, 'that you can protect yourself if you wish to.'

She turned and saw that the second clown had met with more success. He had swarmed up the balcony, and was leaning over the balustrade with both arms round the neck of the unresisting Baroness Elsa, whom he was kissing with much vigour. Though she screamed, and squirmed feebly, she made no real attempt to free herself from his embrace, and was obviously disappointed when he desisted, and turned his attention to Hertha and Grete.

'Ugh!' he exclaimed, with an arm round each,

'I shan't touch the English Mees. She is a snake, and would bite.' Though he spoke in a disguised voice, Marcia felt convinced it was Ernst, who had never forgiven her systematic snubbings.

The noise from the crowd of masks, struggling along in a sea of confetti, became more and more deafening as the afternoon wore on. A dogcart, swathed in flowers, stopped in front of the balcony. It was driven by a bulky negro dressed in a scarlet livery, and next him was seated a lady in a striped satin dress and a feathered hat. She raised her veil and cast an amorous glance up at the balcony, while the black coachman shouted, '*Ack*, my adorable star!' and flung a large bunch of violets at Marcia.

'We must go now,' the Gräfin said. 'It is getting dark, and we can escape by a back street. Everybody must dress for the evening and get something to eat.'

They slipped out and arrived at the flat with no more molestation than some handfuls of confetti and a few shouted endearments. Marcia was horrified when she looked at herself in the glass: all her garments were plastered with confetti, showers fell out of her hair when she took off her hat, and she was festooned with yards of coloured paper. The Gräfin presented an even wilder appearance, but she had lost none of her usual placidity, and sipped her coffee calmly with the confetti dropping into it from her corkscrew curls.

The von Holtzes, who inhabited a spacious

house in the Kampfstrasse, had given up the whole of the lower floor for the Carnival festivities. All the furniture had been removed, with the exception of the piano, and the strongest chairs; for at *Fastnacht* little respect is shown for property, or indeed for anything else.

When the Gräfin and Marcia arrived, a riotous, brilliant crowd filled the rooms. Some couples were waltzing, others were sitting affectionately encircled, while the rest promenaded round the rooms, trying to penetrate the different disguises, teasing, and shouting, and flinging confetti.

Marcia stepped hesitatingly into the crowd. Her full, pale grey chiffon skirts were painted with flights of black bats, and were cut short enough to display her daintily stockinged ankles and buckled shoes. A huge bat with outstretched wings poised on her head, while another formed the bodice of her low dress. Shouts of '*O Fledermaus, O Fledermaus!*' greeted her appearance, the pianist struck up a waltz out of Strauss's famous operetta, and the crowd, yelling the refrain, danced in a ring round her.

'The beautiful English Bat has flown over to us!' a scarlet devil cried, jumping out of the circle and seizing Marcia. 'I am also a creature of darkness, so we belong together.' He whirled her off in a wild waltz, clearing the room before them and shouting at any couples who blocked their way. Her feet hardly touched the ground, and he held her tightly gripped, with his painted face so close to hers that she was obliged to throw her head back to avoid contact with it.

At last, breathless and dizzy, she tore herself

from the demon's embrace and fell on to a chair. Immediately she was surrounded by a crowd of masqueraders: clowns, pierrots, Germanic warriors, and dark-skinned gipsies. She looked at them all intently, but she failed to recognise even those who were not masked. There was, however, no doubt as to her identity. 'The beautiful Marseea' was rallied about all the trivial incidents which had occurred during her stay at Waldberg, and about many which existed solely in the imagination of her inquisitors. She had by this time lost all feelings of restraint and bewilderment, gave as good as she got, and answered the sallies with ready retorts.

The dancing continued without cessation; if the wretched pianist stopped one moment to rest, he was urged on remorselessly. Crowds came and went, disappeared through one door and then suddenly reappeared through another, and the scene looked like a constantly changing human kaleidoscope, while the pounded strains from the piano were merely an accompaniment to the wild din and racket.

Marcia, who found that the mask was no disguise for her, had discarded it thankfully, and was wandering round the rooms with her attendant devil. He had refused all evening to leave her side, and when she was carried off to dance with some one else, he shadowed her persistently, nursing his tail, and whispering amorous inanities into her ear.

Baroness Elsa, her Egyptian costume veiled in Marcia's brilliant scarf, was amiably sharing her seat with a Red Indian, whose bare brown arm

encircled her waist. Delighted giggles came from a sequestered corner, where Hertha von Arnsperg, in the costume of a *vivandière*, which had obviously been borrowed, was submitting with coy appreciation to the embraces of a green pierrot. The two von Holtzes, as gipsies, with a whole mint of coins sprinkled over their persons, were seated on the floor surrounded by a group of masks, whose fortunes they were telling amid shrieks of laughter.

A huge pink domino flung a handful of confetti straight into Marcia's face. 'There, you impertinent hussy!' it squeaked in a shrill, disguised voice; 'you think yourself so charming and fascinating, do you? Don't you see that everybody makes fun of you behind your back, with your airs and graces and affectations?'

'Who are you, you great blundering mask, to insult my beautiful Bat?' the demon exclaimed angrily. 'I will soon find out if you are a man or a woman,' and he seized hold of the hem of the pink domino, displaying a pair of large flat feet, encased in shabby shoes. 'It must be a man,' he commented. 'Look at the size of them.' But the domino uttered an unmistakably feminine shriek of rage, and disappeared in the crowd. 'I should be surprised,' Marcia thought, 'if those shoes do not belong to Excellenz von Hauken.'

Gertrude von Reydorf, who called herself a fishergirl, was attired in a red flannel blouse, and a short striped petticoat which displayed her thick ankles, encased in white cotton stockings. A crowd of dominoes and clowns had gathered round her.

'We know what you have been fishing for all these years,' one jeered. 'But up till now your net has, fortunately for the fishes, been empty.'

'My good old Trudchen!' another cried. 'You haven't been kissed for a long time, I'm sure. We will give you something to look back upon with pleasure when you are feeling lonely and depressed. Come, Masks, I will lead the way.' He seized the stalwart Gertrude round that part of her frame called by courtesy a waist, and imprinted a resounding kiss on her cheek. The rest of the crowd followed suit, amid the elephantine struggles of the half-angry and half-pleased Fräulein von Reydorf.

'My dearest little Fledermaus,' the demon whispered, slipping his arm affectionately through Marcia's, 'I should like to tell you what a devoted slave I am, but I am afraid you might stick your sharp little claws into me; or perhaps you are a vampire, and would suck my life-blood out of my veins.'

'Surely, as you are a devil, you have fire instead of blood,' Marcia replied, looking intently into his face. It was amazing that paint and a beard could form such an effectual disguise; but underneath the Mephistophelian mask there was a familiar 'something' which she knew, and which yet eluded her.

'I seized my heart, which was stewing on the end of a pitchfork,' the demon continued in his disguised voice. 'It is now bleeding on the spike of a bat's wing.'

'You are getting quite poetical,' Marcia said, —they both used the familiar '*Du*' in speaking

—'I am sure sentimental devils would be entirely out of keeping.'

'Come, my cold-hearted enchantress!' he exclaimed. 'This is a magnificent waltz, and I mean to have as much of you as possible before the clock strikes twelve and I must return to Hell.' He fought through all the onslaughts which were being made upon Marcia, and carried her off triumphantly in a dizzy waltz.

'I do wonder who he is,' Marcia thought incessantly. 'Of course I must know him, but then I have met hundreds of men here.'

Meanwhile the dancing was getting faster and more furious; the confetti strewn thickly over the ground made the floor dangerously slippery; and the heat was so great that on most faces the paint was running down in rivulets. In one corner a little girl in a flaxen wig and a sun-bonnet was nursing a doll. A warrior, sweltering under his skins, was making love to her and trying to catch a glimpse of the face under the bonnet.

'Will you get me some milk, please?' she lisped, as Marcia and her companion passed. 'This man will only bring me beer, and I mayn't drink that.'

'It is no good asking me,' the devil replied, slipping his arm round Marcia's waist. 'There are no drinks in the place I come from.'

'I am sure that little girl is Herr von Engelsberg,' Marcia exclaimed with sudden conviction. 'Don't you think so?'

'I! How should I know?' the demon inquired. 'I can only tell you I have never met any one answering to that name down below,

except an old, lame general who beat his wife, and now receives chastisement with red-hot pokers. Perhaps he is the grandfather of your friend.'

Her companion had evidently no intention of assisting her. She tried another tack: 'You know this is my first Carnival,' she said confidentially, as they seated themselves in the corner vacated by Hertha; 'and it is so funny to be behaving in this manner after the stiff and proper balls. When one thinks that, as a rule, even the officers of the same regiment call one another by their titles, it seems too ridiculous.'

'Does it?' he replied easily, stroking her hand. 'To me it is a glimpse of heaven, after existence in the other place. There is only one thing lacking to complete my happiness, and you have it in your power to send a poor devil back to hell compensated for a million more years in an unhealthy climate.' He edged nearer to Marcia, and his grasp tightened.

'I thought you were more sensible than the others,' Marcia said reproachfully; 'but if you are not, I shall get up and go.'

The demon instantly relaxed his grasp. 'Very well,' he said with a tremendous sigh. 'I am rebuffed, and shall hang my tail for the rest of the evening.'

'I shouldn't think it was much fun having one's rooms made into such a mess,' Marcia remarked, changing the conversation.

'No; and "Missis of Wood" has a beautiful house,' her companion said, turning to see whether she had appreciated his translation of their hostess's name.

Marcia jumped—at the peculiar pronunciation of the English words, the mystery was revealed. 'Of course I know who you are,' she cried. 'You must be—' but her companion had hastily fled, and was already swallowed up by the boisterous crowd.

Marcia gazed after him in amazement. 'To think that such a serious, sedate person could behave in this wild manner,' she thought. 'Certainly "Carnival fever" is a strange thing.'

'The lovely Marseea languishing all alone in a corner, because even the devil has deserted her!' a voice exclaimed; and an orange pierrot, with huge, blue buttons and ruff, sank down on to the chair by her side. He seemed of an even more amorous disposition than the departed demon, so Marcia hastily got up, declaring she wished to dance.

'Of course, my darling, we will waltz together,' the pierrot exclaimed, seizing her round the waist. 'Play! Play!' he shouted to the exhausted pianist. 'Play the "Valse Bleue" for the most divine dancer in Waldberg.'

'I really can't see that you dance so beautifully,' Marcia remarked, as they whirled round at a breakneck speed.

'Ha, ha! the English Mees is witty,' her partner gasped. He was almost exhausted, but refused to let go, though she tried to break away from him.

'A round with me, Marseea, my dearest!' a voice exclaimed, and another arm seized her and whirled her off.

She was now dancing with a Spanish toreador,

and as in the terrific heat he had torn off his mask, she recognised Eugène de Villeneuve. After several rounds they at last stopped, panting, to find themselves confronted by the orange pierrot.

'What do you mean?' he cried furiously, dropping his affected squeak, and speaking in an undisguised voice. 'How dare you seize my partner away from me like that?' He was glaring across Marcia at the toreador, and at first she imagined that this was merely part of the acting and tomfoolery.

'It is a direct insult,' Hennig continued violently; and looking at the angry faces of both men, Marcia realised that this was no pretence.

'I have as much right to dance with the lady as you have,' Eugène de Villeneuve replied hotly. 'Do you suppose I shall ask your permission?'

'Certainly. I ordered the waltz specially to dance with her, and you behaved like a manner-less boor in tearing her away.'

'How dare you speak to me in such terms?' Villeneuve spluttered. 'You shall beg my pardon for such an insult.'

'*I* beg your pardon!' Hennig sneered. 'Do you suppose I take lessons in manners from civilians? You will have to apologise to me for your impertinence.'

'If you wait till I apologise, you may rot in your grave,' Villeneuve retorted furiously.

Hennig drew himself up and clicked his shoes, with their blue bows, together. 'My two friends will wait upon you,' he said stiffly.

Eugène de Villeneuve bowed also: 'With

pleasure; you may expect two of my *Corpsbrüder* in due course.'

During the quarrel Marcia had gazed from one to the other, without realising what was happening. Now it flashed upon her, and she drew Hennig hastily away to the seats they had previously vacated. His face was flushed under the melting white paint, and he breathed heavily. 'I must tackle him the right way,' she thought, 'or he will really do it.' She turned in her seat, looked at him for a couple of seconds, and then began to laugh.

'May I ask what the joke is?' he asked in a surly voice. After what had occurred he expected awestruck admiration.

'Your behaviour strikes me as so absolutely ludicrous,' Marcia exclaimed. 'You might be a provincial *bourgeois* instead of an officer who has knocked about and seen something of the world.'

'I don't know what you mean,' Hennig growled angrily. 'Because I am an officer I am not going to allow myself to be insulted.'

'Certainly not; but the childish thing is to imagine any insult in what happened. At Carnival I have been told, and I see for myself, all etiquette and formalities are dropped, and everybody behaves as he likes. Do you suppose anybody asks me if I wish to dance or not? I am just seized on without a word, and if I resented this, I should be considered ridiculous.'

'But can you imagine that I am going to allow a wretched civilian to dictate to me, an officer in a *Garde* regiment?' Hennig demanded.

'I should have thought you would have declined to pick a quarrel with him,' Marcia replied. 'You consider yourself his superior in every way; the most convincing manner in which you can show this would be by disdaining a squabble which is certainly not worthy of your name and position.'

Hennig looked at her irresolutely. She abstained from urging the point that a duel in which her name was involved would react unpleasantly upon herself, as she thought this would carry little weight with him.

'Everybody will be making fun of you to-morrow, when the facts of the case are known,' she added. 'At the best it will show that you have no sense of humour.'

'Well, what shall I do?' he asked, thinking it might be a good thing to get out of the affair, if he could do so without loss of dignity.

'I will find Herr de Villeneuve,' Marcia said. 'I am sure I can explain matters to him. Perhaps you will wait where you are till I return.'

After wandering through the rooms she came upon Villeneuve, fortifying himself with beer and sandwiches. Luckily he was alone, and had not yet communicated the fact of the quarrel to his corps-brothers.

'I should like a few words with you,' she said, giving him a confidential smile. 'We will sit down in this corner, where we can talk undisturbed.' He bowed and led her to two chairs.

'It is rather a difficult thing to say,' she hesitated, moving her chiffon skirts to make room for him by her side. 'But as you are a cavalier

and a corps-student I think you will understand.' He bowed again with a gratified expression.

'I know you have just been greatly incensed by Baron Hennig's behaviour, but I want you to realise that this evening he is not quite accountable for his actions.'

'May I ask what you mean?' Villeneuve inquired, looking at her.

'Of course whatever I say now is in strict confidence, but I imagine the Baron is rather over-excited. They have had a great deal of champagne at the mess, and the result is that he does things for which he may be very sorry afterwards.'

'He was grossly insulting to me!' Villeneuve cried with renewed heat.

'He was certainly rude, and you behaved with great forbearance,' Marcia replied, allowing her eyes to meet those of Villeneuve in an admiring glance. 'But, remember, it is Carnival, and if he chooses to behave like a silly child squabbling over a toy show him that a corps-student has more sense, and knows what to do at *Fastnacht*.'

'You don't expect me to apologise to him for the insult he offered me?' Villeneuve asked, putting his hand upon Marcia's.

'There is no question of apologising,' she replied, allowing her hand to rest in his. 'If you will come with me, and merely express regret for any misunderstanding, you will have given him a lesson in good manners and *savoir faire*, which I guarantee he will not forget.' She jumped up, and offering him both hands smiled persuasively at him.

'How well she understands me!' he thought, as he accepted her proffered arm.

They found Hennig seated where Marcia had left him, staring gloomily at the moving crowd. She swept him, and then Villeneuve, a deep curtsy, and said in a pompous voice: 'Herr Baron Hennig and Herr Eugène de Villeneuve wish to express mutual regret for the ridiculous misunderstanding which has just occurred.'

The whole thing appeared to her like *opéra bouffe*, but the two men bowed solemnly to one another, and made their peace without a smile.

'Thank Heaven!' Marcia ejaculated, as she saw them separate amicably. 'They will never realise what fools they make of themselves.'

By this time the evening was far advanced, and the crowds were rapidly disappearing. Punctually at twelve o'clock the pianist rose with a sigh of relief and shut the lid of the piano, which was so full of confetti that many of the notes refused to sound. A few clowns, Indians, and gipsies were grouped round Erna and Sophie, while Baroness Elsa, sitting in a corner with a Greek warrior, was hastily making the most of her last moments of liberty. A purple pierrot and a lady in a striped dress, with her skirts knotted round her waist and the veil pushed up from her moustached face, were scouring the buffet for any remains of food and drink which might have escaped the ravages of the crowd. Festoons of gaudy paper streamers hung from the chandeliers and were entangled in everything; the floor was thick with confetti, as if there had been a heavy fall of multi-coloured snow; and in one corner,

where a glass had been upset, the particles floated in a miniature lake of beer.

'Come, Mees, we must go now,' the Gräfin said. Her dress was torn and soiled, her hair dishevelled, and she carried over her arm a black domino, which she had discarded during the evening.

There was a yell of remonstrance from the remaining masqueraders: 'No, no, the charming Marseea must not go yet!'

'Hush!' Frau von Holtz exclaimed. 'Remember it is after twelve o'clock. It is now Ash Wednesday, and the police will be here if we make the least noise. You must all go now. I am shutting up the house.'

The Gräfin and Marcia, footsore and weary, trudged home in the silence of exhaustion. The streets were quiet and empty; and but for a belated clown, who hurried furtively past, and the dirty mire of downtrodden confetti, Carnival might never have existed.

The next morning Marcia, in the hopes of dispelling a bad headache, went for a walk on the square facing the King's Palace. Hearing the beat of drums she knew that the guard was about to be relieved, and hurried to the Palace gates to see the ceremony. As the little band of men marched up she saw that the officer in command was Leutnant von Seltenstein. Stepping stiffly, with head erect, his grave, set face looked stern in repose. As he passed Marcia their eyes met, but his remained cold and expressionless, and no smile of reminiscence flitted across his face. He lifted

his unsheathed sword, lowered it to the ground in salutation, and marched through the Palace gates.

Assuredly, Marcia reflected, the Scarlet Devil and this serious officer belonged to different worlds: her friend the demon had disappeared with the whole Carnival madness, as effectively as if he had plunged back into the Lower Regions.

CHAPTER XVII

'KARL, will you please ask the Herr Graf to come to my study,' the Gräfin said one morning, sitting down at her writing-table with an unusually perturbed expression on her calm features.

'My dear Ernst,' she exclaimed, as her son entered, 'I have just heard such a terrible thing. You know how little I interest myself in the gossip and talk of the town, but I met Excellenz von Hauken in the Königstrasse this morning, and she told me that poor young Walther von Vogelschwink was made so miserable in your corps that he has committed suicide. You never even told me that he was dead.'

Ernst flung himself gloomily into a chair, bit his nails, and then remembering the fragility of their pointed elegance, bit his moustache instead, and sought for inspiration in the tips of his new, tapering boots.

'You know, mamma,' he said at last, still keeping his eyes fixed in front of him, 'people like yourself, who are never interested in what goes on, always manage to get hold of the wrong end of the story.'

'I know, my dear son,' the Gräfin replied mildly, 'I do not care for gossip, but I was acquainted with this poor young man; he died in the corps of which you are *Erster Chargierter*,

and I should like to be told the facts of the case.'

'I will tell them you as far as I can,' Ernst said with an effort, 'but of course you must regard all I say as strictly confidential. You are aware that a corps guards its internal affairs most jealously.'

'My dear Ernst,' the Gräfin responded, pushing the last revise of her proofs on one side, 'when have you known me carry tales, or talk about your affairs? Haven't you and Uli found all these years that you can confide safely in your mother?' Indeed, though the Gräfin took the deepest interest in all that concerned her sons, her head was too full of poetic effusions to retain other matters long; and affairs of a purely personal nature were soon elbowed out of her memory by the flowery fantasies which clamoured for expression.

'The fact is,' Ernst said after a short silence, 'Walther von Vogelschwink did something which was discreditable to the corps, and his best friend gave him the only help possible in the circumstances. He placed a loaded revolver near, and left the room. Von Vogelschwink took the hint, and kept his honour by taking his life.'

'It seems very terrible,' the Gräfin exclaimed sadly. 'And he was such a nice innocent-looking young man.'

'Yes; and it's devilish bad for the corps,' Ernst replied moodily. 'We had two suicides last *Semester*. We shall be suspended if we don't take care.'

'And they will not bury the unfortunate young

man in consecrated ground,' the Gräfin cried in agitation.

'Oh, that will be all right. We have got a certificate that he killed himself during a fit of temporary insanity; so he can be buried with honour.'

'When does the funeral take place?'

'To-morrow morning. We shall pass here on our way to the cemetery.' Ernst got up, flicked a speck of dust from his pale-green coat, twisted up his moustache in front of the glass, and then moved to the door.

'By the way,' he remarked carelessly, turning with his hand on the knob, 'after the funeral I shall resign my office as *Erster Chargierter*. There is too much responsibility; it has told on my nerves, and I must go away for a thorough rest and change.'

His mother looked at him with unusual scrutiny. 'What is the matter, my son? Has anything gone wrong?'

Ernst frowned and shuffled his feet impatiently. 'Wrong? What the devil should be wrong?' he demanded rudely. 'Can't one say one is tired and overworked without being subjected to a cross-examination?'

A pained look flitted over the Gräfin's face. She never dwelt upon the shortcomings of her younger son, but upon rare occasions they were forced upon her with undisguisable brutality, and it required all the elasticity of her sanguine temperament to banish them entirely. 'I did not wish to cross-question you,' she said gently, pulling the leaves of her manuscript towards her.

'You must not mind, mamma, if I am a little ill-tempered,' Ernst said shamefacedly. 'I don't really mean it, but my nerves are thoroughly out of order.'

'Very well. Perhaps a change will do you good,' the Gräfin replied.

Ernst hesitated again. 'And, mamma,' he added, 'I should be obliged if you would say nothing to anybody about my resignation and my going for a holiday; not even to Uli, and of course not to the English Mees. I do not wish to be mixed up with this unfortunate Vogelschwink affair. After I have gone, you might just say I had a nervous breakdown, due to overwork, and that I was suddenly ordered a complete rest and change.'

'I will not mention anything you do not wish known,' the Gräfin said, 'though I cannot see the necessity for mystery, especially with your own brother. By the way,' she continued, as Ernst turned to go, 'I heard something else to-day which surprised me greatly. Perhaps you can tell me if it has come to your ears.'

Ernst looked at her suspiciously, and fidgeted with the door-handle.

'Excellenz von Hauken congratulated me this morning on the engagement of Uli to Edith Rosenbaum, and when I said she was mistaken, that there was no question of such a thing, she told me it is already the talk of the town, and that she had heard it from several different sources. Do you know anything about it?'

'I can't say I do,' Ernst remarked, an expression of relief spreading over his face. 'I am

not in the least surprised, though, that the report has got about,' he continued easily. 'Uli has behaved like a fool, and has dangled after that Jew girl in every public place in Waldberg.'

'What should you advise me to do?' the Gräfin sighed plaintively.

'You must make some public denial of the report, and if I were you, mamma, I should give Uli a pretty straight talking to. He is always landing you in some mess.'

As the door shut behind Ernst, the Gräfin turned to the interrupted Fairy Tale, but for once the flow of words did not come: her two sons had effectually spoilt her inspiration.

'Karl,' she called across the passage, 'please tell the Herr Leutnant, directly he returns from barracks, that I wish to speak to him in here.'

This instruction proved unnecessary, for Uli let himself in with his key, and rushed, booted and spurred, straight into the Gräfin's study. His face was flushed, and he appeared unwontedly disturbed.

'Mamma! I cannot understand it at all. Such an unpleasant thing has happened,' he exclaimed incoherently. 'The Colonel has spoken to me this morning, and inquired about the truth of a report which has come to his ears, that I am engaged to Edith Rosenbaum. Of course I told him that it was absolutely untrue, and he replied that he was most glad to hear it, as under the circumstances he, naturally, could not have signed the *Konsense*.'

'Yes, Uli, I have already been spoken to this morning on the subject of your supposed engage-

ment to Edith Rosenbaum,' the Gräfin replied gravely. 'Apparently all Waldberg is talking about it. How is it, my dear son, that you always manage to get your name coupled with some girl? This is the fifth time during the last few years that I have had to rescue you from a reported engagement.'

Uli groaned, and looked helplessly at the Gräfin with his ingenuous blue eyes. 'I assure you I don't know, mamma,' he replied miserably. 'I really don't flirt, and if I see that a girl is making up to me, I avoid her as much as I possibly can. I tell you I have sometimes even bolted when I didn't know how to get out of a thing.'

'And Edith Rosenbaum of all people!' the Gräfin continued. Though she was probably the least prejudiced aristocrat in Waldberg her broad-mindedness did not extend to her future daughter-in-law. The most charming and high-born girl was only just good enough for her dear, handsome Uli, and the mere thought of his binding himself to this Jewish maiden filled her with consternation.

'Have you done anything to encourage Edith Rosenbaum?' she queried, looking at the crest-fallen and dejected figure of her son.

'No, I am sure I have not,' he declared. 'I have tried to get out of her way.'

'And yet I hear that you have been seen with her in every public place in the town—the theatre, the ice, and the Bazaar. Surely that was not necessary?'

'I don't know how it happened,' Uli replied

feebly. 'She was always there, and always managed to tack herself on to me. I don't know how other men manage,' he concluded desperately, 'but I don't see how you can shake women off unless you are positively rude to them.'

'Well, we must put a final stop to this affair,' the Gräfin remarked firmly. 'I think the best thing will be for me to write to Frau Rosenbaum, and tell her that, in the circumstances, it will be better for our acquaintanceship to cease. I am very sorry to do such a thing, but I see no alternative.'

The Gräfin looked genuinely distressed at the thought of the pain and mortification she would have to inflict, but she had been touched on her vulnerable spot.

Uli heaved a sigh of relief. 'Yes, that will be the thing to do,' he said gratefully. 'Indeed you are the best mamma any one ever had; you always help me out of all my difficulties.' He crossed over, and bending down, kissed the Gräfin's hand affectionately.

'My dear son,' she said, embracing him with emotion, 'I will manage this for you; and then some day you must really choose a *Braut* who will be worthy of you, and whom I can love.'

Left alone, the Gräfin drew out a piece of coroneted, cheap writing-paper, and dipped her pen into the ink. Then she paused, shook her head, and finally slipped the notepaper back into a drawer. 'Not to-day,' she thought to herself. 'It is much better to give such things mature consideration. I will write the letter to-morrow.'

Though not usually a person of moods, the Gräfin found that the morning's events had quite

unsettled her; so she shut up the proofs of her Fairy Tale in Verse, donned a large blue apron, and was soon absorbed in the printing and sorting of some of her under-exposed and over-developed photographic masterpieces.

. . . . . .

The next morning, when Marcia was reading German with the Gräfin, they suddenly heard strains of music, and the tramp of horses' feet in the distance.

'Chopin's Funeral March!' Marcia cried, running to the window.

'It must be poor Walther von Vogelschwink,' the Gräfin ejaculated, pulling aside the curtains.

'Good heavens! is he dead?' Marcia exclaimed. 'Why, at Carnival he was dressed as a lady in a striped dress, and was laughing and joking as much as any one. What on earth did he die of?'

'I really don't know,' the Gräfin replied vaguely. 'Ernst only told me that he was dead.' She blushed at the unwonted falsehood, but Marcia's attention was riveted on the street below.

The procession was now visible, and the haunting melody of the Chopin March boomed forth through the muffled drums. All the students were in full *Wichs*; Ernst and Don Manuel, with their sashes wrapped in crape, rode with drawn swords. Eugène de Villeneuve, also on horseback, carried the huge standard of the Corps Suevia, its brilliant colours hidden by thick folds of crape. The hearse was drawn by four large black horses, and was followed by all the other members of the corps on foot, crape veiling the colour of their caps, and their drawn swords in

their hands. Marcia gazed after them as they marched down the street, the melancholy strains of the beautiful music growing fainter in the distance, until it, and the regular tramp of the procession, had died away altogether.

'I should like to know how it happened,' Marcia said slowly. 'It seems so tragic. He was so young and'—'silly' she was going to say, but substituted 'gay' instead—'and we saw him such a short time ago.'

The Gräfin did not reply, and, as she seemed far less communicative than usual, they both relapsed into silence.

That evening a note was handed to the Gräfin. It was from Ernst, and merely stated that, as he had wished to leave as soon as possible after the funeral ceremony, he had packed his things and had sent them straight to the station. There was nothing more, no word of explanation as to why he had not at least returned to say good-bye to his mother. She stifled a sigh, and tried to speak naturally, but she was too open and ingenuous to be a good actress.

'I forgot to tell you,' she remarked to Uli; 'Ernst has had a nervous breakdown, and has gone off on a holiday.' Ordinarily this announcement would have evoked some questions from Uli, but to-day he was entirely absorbed in his own affairs.

'Have you written to Frau Rosenbaum, mamma?' he asked, after a short silence.

'No; I have had so much to think about,' the Gräfin replied apologetically. 'I will send the letter some time to-morrow.'

It was therefore two days after the funeral that a coroneted note, in the Gräfin's fine handwriting, was brought to Frau Rosenbaum by one of her resplendent footmen. Both of them had already given notice: their self-respect could no longer stand the strain of service in a Semitic household. One of them had taken a situation with a querulous and gouty old baron in Silesia, who offered him half his present wages and none of the luxuries of the Rosenbaum establishment; while the other preferred lack of employment and peasant's food to life among the fleshpots of Israel.

Ella Rosenbaum gave a start of pleasure when she saw the Gräfin's handwriting, but her face clouded as she hastily perused the finely written sheets. The letter, which commenced with the formal '*Sehr geehrte Frau Rosenbaum*,' continued:

'It is a matter of deep regret to me that I should be forced into an action which may appear rude and ungrateful. You probably have heard of the unfounded report which has coupled the names of your daughter and my son together. Under the peculiar conditions existing in Waldberg, which nobody can regret more than myself, such a report must necessarily be prejudicial to my son, and I feel that it is my duty to put the most final and effectual stop to all gossip on the subject. I must therefore, most unwillingly, beg you to consider as closed an acquaintanceship which, on my part, contains the remembrance of many pleasant days, and gratitude for the hospitality you have invariably shown me. It

has been a matter of much regret to me that I have been unable to assist you in your social campaign. As my son Ernst told you at the beginning of the season, I did my utmost in your interest; but we none of us, alas! can reform the world, or alter the social conditions in which we live. Pray accept my sincere regrets and apologies for any pain or annoyance I may have caused you, and believe me to be,—Yours very truly,

ADELGUNDE, GRÄFIN VON RÜHLHEIM-HOCHBURG
GEB. FREIIN VON UND ZU WALDHAUSEN-NIERENSTEIN.'

Ella Rosenbaum's first feelings were of baffled rage and disappointment. So this was the end of all her hopes and aspirations! She was to be thrown on one side like an old glove, the moment it suited these high-born paupers. And for the reason that an engagement between her daughter and the penniless son had been suggested. The mere thought of such an alliance was so contaminating that all acquaintanceship must be violently cut off, to wipe out the insult offered to the aristocratic family feelings. And one member of this family, she reflected angrily, had taken money from her, the despised Jewess, money which he had neither the power nor the intention of ever repaying. In fact, he—the Graf von Rühlheim-Hochburg—had accepted from her a sum, inconsiderable in itself, but large according to his standard, and compared with the mere pittance upon which his mother lived. He had pocketed her money, he had spent many tête-à-tête evenings with her, he had graciously deigned to accept her hospitality, appreciation, and help; but

she must expect nothing in return, except the honour of having assisted a Graf von Rühlheim-Hochburg: she must bow meekly when given her *congé* because the elder brother did not conduct his affairs in as circumspect a manner as his junior, and the august name of Rühlheim-Hochburg had been mixed up with the despised name of Rosenbaum.

And where was this charming Graf Ernst now? Rumour had it that this sudden change of air was compulsory, and she was quite sure it must be the case. He was out of her reach at present, and she felt an impelling necessity for revenge upon some one. Sitting down at the little writing-table, she rapidly covered a sheet of her scented notepaper with the vulgar recriminations which her ill-bred and wounded feelings dictated. The Gräfin should have a reply to her letter which she could never forget. It would reveal to her that the Frau Rosenbaum, whose acquaintance she now declined, held the honour of the Graf Ernst Rühlheim-Hochburg in her hand. This was revenge, she felt, the revenge of the downtrodden Jew upon the haughty Christian.

As she closed the letter, her first violent sensation of anger subsided—her rage, having found no obstacle against which to hurl itself, evaporated gradually, and left merely a numb sensation of defeat. This was an end to all her hopes; the one possible door into the stronghold of Waldberg society had been shut in her face, and though she might wound and hurt the Gräfin, she could never now effect an entry.

Then her thoughts turned to the Gräfin herself,

and she remembered her kindness, her never-failing courtesy, her harmless occupations, and her ingenuous belief in the goodness of her fellow-creatures. Ella Rosenbaum, though vain, uncontrolled, selfish, and vulgar, was neither bad-hearted nor devoid of gratitude, and, her passion having spent itself, she now thought of the many occasions upon which the Gräfin had shown her kindness in the face of Waldberg sneers. She was generous enough to believe the Gräfin's assurance that the utmost had been done to obtain her recognition in the society which scorned and disdained her.

She hesitated a moment; then took the letter she had just written, and flung it into the open fire.

'No,' she thought, as she watched the charred remains fly up the chimney. 'Despite my birth, I will show that I know how to behave like a magnanimous, aristocratic lady. I will send a dignified reply to the Gräfin, and then I shall make Jacob buy me a villa outside Frankfurt. I won't stay a week longer in this detestable place to be insulted. As these poverty-stricken aristocrats turn up their noses at me, I shall shine in a circle where I am looked up to and admired.'

Sitting down at her writing-table again, she started on the second epistle, but found it considerably harder to write than the first. She bit her pen, scribbled a few lines in her large, sprawling hand, then considered them insufficiently elegant, tore up the sheet and began again. After much thought the following letter was eventually indited:—

'HIGHLY HONOURED FRAU GRÄFIN,—I was about to write to you when your note was brought in. I am very sorry that you and Graf Ulrich should have been upset by the report of his engagement to my daughter Edith. I assure you that when it came to my ears, I most emphatically denied the statement, and assured everybody that I and my husband would never dream of giving our consent to the marriage of our only child to a penniless lieutenant. As to the other part of your letter, I was myself about to announce the termination of our acquaintance. After travelling over the world and living in the most brilliant towns, I find Waldberg unspeakably dull and behind the times in everything. My great friend the Princess Olga Borzoi-Riskakoff, who has a magnificent mansion in the fashionable quarter of Frankfurt, has persuaded us to settle near her; and as her son, the Prince Stefan Borzoi-Riskakoff, is desperately in love with my daughter, I do not doubt that the dear girl will soon consent to become a Princess. The family is of royal lineage, and we shall find ourselves in society which will be thoroughly congenial, and more suited to our tastes than that of Waldberg.

Hoping your last literary effort will meet with success,—Believe me, highly honoured Frau Gräfin, yours, ELLA ROSENBAUM.'

'Well, I call that a splendid letter,' she thought proudly to herself, as she read it over for the third time. 'Several nasty little hits for the poor Gräfin, but dignified and well-bred in tone. That will show her that Edith can do a lot better for

herself than by marrying her son. I hope to goodness she will show him the letter. It will take down his pride a bit.'

She closed the envelope and rang the bell. At the appearance of the footman, who had dropped even the thin veneer of respect he had once shown her, she held out the envelope and said defiantly: 'See that this letter is delivered immediately to the Frau Gräfin von Rühlheim-Hochburg. And you can go at the end of the week. Frau Meyer will pay you your month's wages.'

The lackey gave her an insolent stare. To receive an order from one of this reviled race infuriated him, even although it meant immediate release from bondage to the house of Israel.

CHAPTER XVIII

Spring had come, and all the flowering shrubs with which Waldberg abounded burst into bloom; the new green shone out among the fir-trees in the King's deer-parks, and the air was warm and balmy.

The Gräfin, who the previous year had learnt to bicycle, got out her machine and took Marcia for rides in the beautiful woods surrounding the town. These expeditions were fraught with difficulty, as the Gräfin could neither mount nor dismount without assistance, except when she fell off involuntarily at the approach of some vehicle in the road. Her machine had the habit of shying like a frightened horse, but she was not in the least daunted by the various tumbles and mishaps.

Ernst's name was not mentioned in the family. For a long time he did not write, and no information reached the Gräfin on the subject of his hasty departure. The corps kept its affairs rigidly secret, and the only person who could have thrown light upon the matter had passed beyond the possibility of explanations. Of course, every sort of rumour circulated through the town, some possible, others wildly grotesque; but none of them penetrated to the Gräfin's ear, and she was spared the comments of her charitable friends.

At last a letter arrived from Montreux, in

which Ernst stated briefly that he was engaged to a beautiful South American heiress of ancient Spanish family. She came from Buenos Ayres, where the nuptials would be celebrated—he was accompanying his bride and his bride's mother in the next boat, which sailed in ten days' time. His *Braut* had two enormous properties out there, on which they would live, and he could not say if he would ever return to Waldberg. 'After seeing the world, I should find the town unspeakably dull and behind the times,' he continued, unconsciously quoting Frau Rosenbaum's words; and he closed with a few cursory and trite professions of affection, but with no word of regret for the pain and anxiety he had caused his mother.

If the Gräfin suffered from this blow—and Marcia felt convinced that she did—she never spoke of it, or uttered a complaint; and as far as externals were concerned, Ernst passed irrevocably out of the life of the little household.

The longer Marcia lived in Waldberg society, the more difficulty she experienced in comprehending its code of morals. As for the *convenances*, these she found completely baffling. Why, she wondered, should it be considered improper to walk with a member of the opposite sex? So incriminating was it thought for feminine reputation to promenade in the Königstrasse with a cavalier, that Waldberg had raised horrified protestations when the elderly wife of a retired general had dared to take public constitutionals there with a gouty and white-haired comrade of her husband's. And yet the Teuton Mrs. Grundy, so morbidly sensitive on this point, was in no way

outraged by the most protracted tête-à-tête, provided the couples were on cycle wheels and not on their own feet. If a member of the gentler sex, you might not walk once down the Königstrasse in the company of a man, though you were under the eyes of the whole town; but no fault would be found if you mounted your machine and rode away into the secluded depths of the woods, your cavalier pedalling beside you.

Often, when the Gräfin was occupied with her literary labours, some of the officers would call for the English Mees, and escort her on expeditions in the cool of the evening. Herr von Seltenstein was her favourite companion, and they had many interesting conversations. He was the only man she had met in Waldberg who could converse naturally, without drifting into too personal channels. Megersdorf was an agreeable, and, in some respects, a pleasing young man, but he was apt to become sentimental, and therefore boring; while Baron Hennig and the juvenile lieutenants, von Hildebrandt and von Engelsberg, were only tolerable if they came together—singly, Marcia found, they were not to be trusted. Indeed, she often thought that the restrictions with which the sexes were hedged round were less pointless than they seemed. Neither the girls nor the men were as yet fit for any freedom of intercourse. When they obtained it, their behaviour was that of children who, tasting wine for the first time, find that it mounts to the head.

'We are much more lax on these subjects than we used to be, even fifteen years ago,' Herr von Seltenstein informed Marcia one evening, when

they were riding along on the even roads of the royal park. 'This has come about with the invasion of your English sports — tennis and bicycling. The fat mammas cannot always pant after us, so they throw a sop to their conscience by declaring that it is quite proper to leave the young people alone in special circumstances.'

'And they make the incongruity of their behaviour more obvious by calling down the heavens if a girl allows a man to accompany her two steps along the street,' Marcia replied.

'Ah, you see they have a most sophistical mode of reasoning,' von Seltenstein remarked. 'They argue that if the young people are, so to speak, "taught their place"—if they are kept at a rigid distance from one another ordinarily—then, when on special occasions they are thrown together unchaperoned, they will continue on the lines of their upbringing, and observe the same propriety of behaviour.'

'What a ridiculous thing to imagine,' Marcia replied. 'Naturally, if they are not brought up to liberty, they cannot be expected to know what to do on the rare occasions when they get it. Besides, if they may not do things openly, the chances are ten to one that they will do them on the sly. I am sure the girls here know more about the scandals and the things they are not supposed to——' She stopped abruptly, realising that she was giving away her *Kranz* friends. 'How horrid of me to say that,' she thought; but to her relief von Seltenstein changed the subject.

'I remember quite well, about fifteen years ago, a cousin of mine, who was in an Uhlan regiment

stationed in Silesia, got engaged, and one Sunday he took his *Braut* to church unchaperoned. The Commander of his regiment notified to him that he desired such a thing should not occur again. He did not wish his officers to compromise themselves.'

'Compromise yourself by going to church with your fiancée!' Marcia cried.

'By going unchaperoned,' von Seltenstein corrected. 'They should have dragged some unfortunate schoolgirl sister, or maiden aunt with them, and then it would have been all right. But thank goodness, we have grown a trifle less narrow-minded now.'

They had reached a delightful spot in the woods, a small clearing carpeted with moss and surrounded by fine old fir-trees, standing straight as sentinels against the clear spring sky.

'Let us rest a little here,' von Seltenstein said, jumping off his bicycle and leaning it against a tree. Marcia followed his example, and they sat down side by side on the thick carpet of moss and pine-needles.

There was a short silence, broken by Marcia.

'How delicious the pines smell!' she exclaimed, sniffing the scented air.

Her companion, who had been looking abstractedly at the opposite trees, pulled himself together with a jerk, and turned towards her. 'It is delicious,' he said, 'and I can never tell you, gnädiges Fräulein, what a pleasure these rides and talks have been to me. I am not a "ladies' man," and I have never before met a young girl to whom I could speak as I have spoken to you.'

Marcia glanced at him anxiously. Her feminine instinct had apprehended danger, and she suddenly felt both disappointed and antagonistic. Undoubtedly she liked Seltenstein: his society was congenial to her, and she considered him an upright, kind, and talented man, devoid of the affectations and conceit of his class. One of his great attractions, however, lay in the fact that he had never —except at Carnival, which did not count— attempted to make love to her. She instinctively felt that the moment he did so, he would place himself under the searchlight of her national and individual criticism. Up till now he had been a friend—one whom she valued—and as such the peculiarities of dress, manners, and thought, which were inseparable from his nationality, had been passed over, and hardly noticed. Now, suddenly, with the change in his tone, they flashed into prominence. Marcia's was a temperament to which externals appealed most strongly. She had often felt—and had been ashamed of herself for feeling it—that she was more compliant and amiable to Seltenstein when he accompanied her in his well-cut uniform than when he was in the monstrous attire which he styled his 'bicycling costume.' Several times she had caught herself replying intolerantly to some of his remarks, because she could not take her eye off his baggy stockinette knickerbockers, held in by elastic at the knee; or she had felt temporarily alienated by his ready-made tie and elastic-sided boots. She was conscious that to enter her inmost affections, an even more rigorous standard must be passed, and Seltenstein could only pass her standard of

friendship. In attempting to qualify for anything else, he exposed himself to an ordeal of criticism which was bound to prove fatal.

Meanwhile he was speaking with a diffidence which Marcia knew how to appreciate in a German man, and that man an officer.

'After all these long talks and expeditions we have had together,' von Seltenstein was saying, 'I feel that we understand one another extraordinarily well, and if only I could be assured that you share my feelings, I should indeed be happy. I am at present not very brilliantly situated, but, as you know, I am working hard, and hope to get on to the General Staff. You would like Berlin and the life there; it is devoid of all the narrowness and gossip of a little town like this. With your charm and your social gifts you would shine in the society of a metropolis, and I should indeed be proud if you would consent to become my wife.'

He had spoken so unaffectedly and humbly that Marcia for the moment quite forgot his elastic-sided boots and his ready-made tie, and felt genuinely sorry for the pain she would have to inflict upon him.

'I am afraid what you ask is quite, quite impossible,' she said gently. 'But I appreciate greatly the honour you do me in asking me to become your wife. Though I have always considered you a friend, I don't love you, and if I did, I could not marry you.'

Seltenstein, who had kept his eyes fixed upon her, started.

'I mean,' she continued, noting his surprise, 'it

would be quite impossible for me to marry a man who is not of my own nationality.'

'But why?' Seltenstein exclaimed. 'If you really cared for him, surely the rest would not matter?'

'For a short time it might not,' Marcia replied, 'and I suppose there are rare instances of mixed marriages turning out successfully; but, I should imagine, in such cases the woman is probably a nonentity, or at any rate not a personality strong enough to experience difficulty or distaste in merging it.'

'I assure you,' Seltenstein interrupted earnestly, 'I should never want you to give up your tastes or your individuality. I know some men prefer their wives to have none, but you know that is not what I feel.'

'I am sure you would always be kind and considerate,' Marcia responded. 'But that is not quite what I mean. It is a little difficult to explain. I feel most strongly that in marriage, the most complicated relationship in life, there must of necessity be so many pitfalls resulting from the differences of temperament and character, that if, added to these, there is the difference of nationality and upbringing, the result is almost bound to be unsatisfactory, if not disastrous.'

'Of course there are little differences in etiquette and custom,' Seltenstein exclaimed. 'But you are so clever and tactful that you would soon master these.'

'I was not thinking of customs of this sort,' Marcia replied. 'It doesn't matter in the least whether the men or the ladies bow first, or

whether you are addressed as "Mrs. Smith" or "Gnädige Frau." The things that do matter are the ideas and manners which we are brought up to regard as indispensable and right. I should be bound to offend you constantly in these, and you would do the same with me. That it would be done unwittingly would only make the state of affairs more hopeless.'

'What sort of things do you mean?' Seltenstein urged. He felt if he could only understand Marcia's objections, he might argue them away.

She hesitated. It was not easy to convey to the man who cared for her, and had just asked her to become his wife, that a not unimportant matter was, for example, the difference in manners at table. She felt that she would be less irritated and upset if her husband informed her that he had gambled away large sums, than if he ate his soup noisily and stuck his napkin under his chin. There was a considerable amount of truth, she reflected, in Hennig's anecdote of the German in England.

'Well, you know,' she said at last, 'we have set up a certain standard of manners, and we are very intolerant about those people who do not conform to it. Your nation has also a standard of manners, but though, of course, in some points they correspond, they are, generally speaking, as removed from one another as the two poles.'

'But surely all these things are very small,' Seltenstein pleaded.

'It seems to me,' Marcia said, 'that in an irrevocable intimacy, such as marriage, it is just the small things that are most vital, and are most

likely to cause friction. Take, for instance, the German idea of courtesy to women: there is a great deal of hand-kissing and compliments, but the men allow the ladies to wait on them, and a German man considers it beneath him to carry a parcel, though it is not beneath him to see the lady doing so, while he walks by her side empty-handed. It seems very rude and ungracious to say all this to you,' Marcia added with contrition; 'but you asked me to tell you just what I feel on the subject, and I am paying you the compliment of being absolutely frank.'

Von Seltenstein, who had listened to her with almost painful intentness, fidgeted uneasily with his tartan tie. He was always ill at ease in civilian clothing, and never felt comfortable except in the dark, trim uniform which seemed the only appropriate garb for his rather stiff personality.

'You know I respect all your feelings,' he said, clearing his throat, 'but I still maintain that every objection you have put forward could easily be overcome. I am aware that in many German marriages the wife does wait on the husband, but I can assure you I should not wish this to be the case. I would do my utmost to stand between you and all difficulties.'

'I am sure you would,' Marcia replied gratefully 'But you could not help the difficulties that must unavoidably occur if any one of my nationality, temperament, and upbringing were to try to become a German wife. We are far too independent.'

'I would not grudge you your independence,' von Seltenstein asserted eagerly.

'No, but German life, and opinion, and all the rules and regulations of society would,' Marcia declared. 'Think how furious I should be if the *Kommandeuse* lectured me because she considered that my habits were too emancipated, or my hats too fashionable, and it appears this is what many of the wives of German officers have to submit to.'

'If I succeed in getting on to the General Staff you would have nothing of this sort to worry you,' von Seltenstein said. 'None of the difficulties you have mentioned are insurmountable. Tell me, are you keeping anything back? Can you mention any fundamental differences between our two nationalities which you would find a bar to a mixed marriage?'

Marcia made a little pattern with the fir-needles by her side, and then destroyed it before she answered.

'Though you do not see it, all the things I have mentioned are not mere trivialities, as they may appear to be, but serious matters to a person like myself. If, however, you want an ethical difference which might well come between us, I will give you one. Your national idea of honour and ours are diametrically opposed, and I have lived long enough in Germany to see that this is a question which penetrates to the very root of German life. You have only got to think for one moment in order to realise the insuperable barrier that two different codes of honour would be bound to erect between a husband and wife.'

Von Seltenstein sighed, and stared gloomily at

a flowering cherry-tree, standing out almost violently in a blaze of vivid green and white against the sombre gloom of the firs. The very gaiety and joy of spring, which seemed to breathe all round them, made the futility of his own hopes appear even more bitter. This question of a different national standard of honour was one which he and Marcia had often discussed, and had always disagreed upon. As a man, and a German officer, it was naturally of the most vital importance to him, but he had always argued that the question was of such minor significance to a woman that it might be bridged over by a great affection. He was too much accustomed to the lack of individuality and mental independence in the women of his own nationality to realise the importance such a matter must necessarily have in Marcia's eyes.

She turned and looked at his slightly averted face. Its habitual expression of gravity had deepened into profound gloom, and she knew that at last he had realised the finality of her arguments.

'I should like you to feel,' she said gently, 'how very, very sorry I am to have given you pain.' She rose to her feet, shaking the pine needles from her skirt. He got up mechanically, and stood by her side. 'It is a great disappointment to me also,' she continued, as he remained silent and motionless. 'I have always valued your friendship, and now I suppose it is "Goodbye."' She held out her hand. Bending down, he kissed it gravely.

'Yes, it is the end,' he said. 'I shall go to

Berlin as soon as it can be arranged, and you, I suppose, will be returning to England.'

They rode home in a depressed silence. Neither of them felt inclined to attempt an interchange of platitudes, and everything else that was possible had already been said.

Von Seltenstein held open the large door leading into the courtyard behind the Gräfin's flat. Marcia dismounted and pushed her bicycle through.

'Good-bye,' he said shortly, 'and if we do not meet again before one or other of us leaves Waldberg, I would wish you *gute Reise*, and all happiness in the future.' He did not give her time to reply, but stepped beyond the door, which closed heavily and shut him out from her sight.

'What a pity!' she sighed as she mounted the steps. Her feelings were a mixture of selfish regret for the pleasant rides and talks which had come to an end, and of very real sorrow for the wound she had unwillingly inflicted.

CHAPTER XIX

MEANWHILE other members of Waldberg society were availing themselves of the liberty which fine weather and the possession of a bicycle afforded.

One afternoon Baroness Elsa, Hertha von Arnsperg, and the two von Holtzes, accompanied by Baron Hennig and three of his fellow-officers, went for an expedition on their machines. It was an exhilarating day: the cuckoo shouted in the trees, herds of deer sprang hastily away at their approach, and the air felt both soft and exhilarating.

Every one was in the highest spirits except Elsa, who wore a pensive, sad expression. She could not take her eyes off Erna and Sophie, who were attired in new bicycling costumes of green and white check, with gilt buttons down the front, and green and white check straw hats to match. How unfair it was, she reflected, that she, Baroness Elsa, had no bicycling costume, but was obliged to wear an old black merino skirt, shortened by herself into uneven lengths, and not in the least adapted to this form of 'sport.'

'Baroness is very silent,' Hennig exclaimed, riding up to her. 'Perhaps she is in love.'

He also had not purchased a biycling costume, but, unlike Elsa, this fact did not affect him at

all. He was quite convinced that he was alluring and 'smart,' whatever he might choose to wear. Attired in an old and shiny dinner jacket, he had tucked his black trousers into stockinette gaiters, decorated with mock buttons, and this, in conjunction with a voluminous red tie, gave, he felt, a sporting touch to his costume.

'What has become of Fräulein von Heller and her sister?' asked Leutnant von Reubert, a young Hanoverian. He pronounced his 'st's' hard, and in conversation implied that nothing good existed outside North Germany, though he never betrayed the slightest wish to return there himself.

'I really don't know what Erika, the eldest Fräulein von Heller, does with herself,' Hertha von Arnsperg replied, trying to look round at Herr von Reubert, and nearly falling off in the attempt. 'Of course she is much older than we are, so we see very little of her. Grete, the youngest, often stays with friends in the country.'

'I saw Fräulein Erika bicycling here the other day, when I was riding,' Hennig said. 'I saluted her, but she did not seem to see me. I thought at the time it was very funny.' It always struck him as remarkable that his person could ever be overlooked.

'Well, she doesn't care to go with us, and I 'm sure we don't mind,' Elsa said disagreeably. Her black merino skirt made her feel bitter towards everybody.

The members of the *Kranz* had begged Armgarde to join their expedition, but an interesting event was expected to take place in the autumn,

and bicycling was prohibited for the young Gräfin Radwitz. This was a subject of deep interest to the noble young ladies, whose mammas fondly imagined that their innocent daughters held the stork responsible for all increase in the population.

'Armgarde always annoys Kurt with her useless attempts at cooking,' Hertha had remarked to Elsa—the differences in the Radwitz establishment had naturally not escaped the inquisitive eyes of the *Kranz* friends—'I only hope she won't annoy him by having a girl instead of a boy. I don't believe he will forgive her if she hashes this, and doesn't present him with a son and heir.'

'No; it would be awful to find one had a daughter instead of a son,' Elsa had sighed in response: in accordance with national sentiment she regarded the birth of a daughter as a matter for condolence.

'Ah, gnädiges Fräulein looks colossally smart on a bicycle,' Herr von Engelsberg cried, nearly running his front wheel into Erna's in his attempt to get as near to her as possible. He looked like an undersized waiter, whose whole physical and mental vitality had centred in his moustache. His close-shaven head was covered by a black, clerical-looking felt hat, and his short person was attired in a heterogeneous collection of garments, whose sole uniformity lay in a general absence of fit. However, an officer and a *von*, if he is equipped with an eyeglass in addition to a moustache, need never languish in vain. Erna, though she preferred Baron Hennig, whom she considered bold and bad, and dreadfully interest-

ing, nevertheless received Engelsberg's compliments with a gratified smile.

'I and my sister get all our frocks from Paris, she remarked, looking down complacently at the gilt buttons.

'Ah, any one can see that,' Engelsberg replied. 'Have you seen the bicycling costume of the English Mees? It is very smart also.' Engelsberg, being young and inexperienced, did not realise the stupidity of making such a remark to his companion.

Erna snorted disdainfully. 'I don't see anything smart in that plain gray coat and skirt the Mees wears,' she exclaimed. 'But then a stick like that could never look really well.'

'Of course, of course,' Engelsberg assented hurriedly, oblivious of the fact that he had been pestering Marcia with his attentions.

'By the way,' Erna remarked, 'you know how the English Mees and Herr von Seltenstein were always bicycling together, almost every day. A blind person could see how wildly in love she is with him. Well, he must have been afraid she would catch him, for he has simply bolted—has gone, I hear, to Berlin to escape her importunities.'

'I 'think gnädiges Fräulein is misinformed,' Hennig interposed. 'I happen to know that the Mees's affections are not engaged in that direction. Herr von Seltenstein, who can only talk about tactics and *Kriegspiel*, is hardly the kind of man to appeal to a romantic young girl who is not as cold and unapproachable as she may appear.' He twisted his moustache with a knowing and mysterious glance round, which said

plainly: 'You see in me the captor of the heart of the English Mees.' When riding a bicycle, Hennig made a point of twisting his moustache: it enabled him to show the admiring assembly that he could ride easily without the support of the handle-bars.

'The horrid Mees has been making love to Baron Hennig,' each of the noble young ladies thought angrily, and they hated Marcia even more.

'Let us rest here,' Leutnant von Reubert suggested. The girls, whose saddles were so low that in pedalling their knees almost collided with their noses, had no idea of dismounting gracefully. They waited until their machines stopped, and then fell off, entangling their skirts in the pedals, and incidentally displaying large expanses of plaid stocking.

This operation being effected, they seated themselves on the ground, after carefully spreading out their pocket-handkerchiefs as a guard against damp and insects. To their right, peeping out among the trees, was a little hunting-lodge, which was used on the rare occasions when the King invited guests to shoot the deer and wild boar.

'Let us go and see if we can get in,' Reubert suggested. 'It would be rather fun to see what it is like inside.'

'No, better stop where we are,' Hennig replied, taking out a tiny looking-glass, and a brush, with which he lovingly brushed up his moustache. 'Of course it is all locked up.'

'Well, I shall go and see,' Erna exclaimed. 'Who will come with me?' To her disappoint-

ment Engelsberg, and not Hennig, immediately offered his services, and the two disappeared together.

In a few minutes Erna came running back, breathless and excited.

'We tried all the doors and windows and they are tight shut; but imagine what we found,' she cried: 'a lady's bicycle leaning against the wall at the back. Who do you think it can belong to, and where do you suppose the owner is?' She looked round in delighted anticipation of some mystery.

Hennig, though usually disposed to scent illicit proceedings in the most harmless contingencies, showed no interest upon this occasion.

'It is probably some one who has gone to look for flowers, and has left her bicycle there,' he remarked, getting up and carefully shaking the dust from his black suit.

'Oh, if you show no interest in finding out who it can be, we may just as well return,' Erna replied rather snappishly; and Hertha, who had failed to engage Reubert's attention, agreed.

When they had at last safely mounted their machines—Elsa fell off several times in the process, and Erna was afraid her skirt did not sit properly—they were joined by Engelsberg.

'I tried all the locks again,' he exclaimed. 'But though one of the shutters was open, I could not force the catch of the window, and I don't think anybody can possibly be in the house now. There wasn't a sound or any sign of life.'

'Of course if there were people inside, they would naturally have kept quiet when they heard

steps,' Erna replied darkly. 'I should have liked to get to the bottom of this mystery, if only other people had taken some interest in the affair.'

'Young ladies always imagine mysteries in everything,' Baron Hennig remarked nonchalantly. He was getting bored, and calculated that if they rode back quickly, he would have time to change into his uniform and go to the theatre. Added to which, he was confident that the explanation he had offered for the presence of a bicycle at the lonely hunting-lodge was correct. The person who was capable of making a rendezvous there would not be idiotic enough to leave a conspicuous proof of the fact for any one to see.

'There was a number on the bicycle,' Engelsberg resumed, '1191. Does any one happen to know that number?'

The eyes of Erna von Holtz and Baroness Elsa suddenly met in a startled glance. 'I see you remember too,' Erna whispered excitedly, riding close to Elsa. 'Of course, that is Erika von Heller's number. I thought something was up, though the others jeered. Don't say anything about it yet. I will call at the Hellers' house on my way back, and find out whether Erika is out.'

'But how awful!' Elsa ejaculated delightedly. 'Who do you think she meets there?'

Erna shrugged her shoulders, 'How can I tell? None of our friends, I am sure. She is too old and *passée* for them—not one of them will look at her now.'

'It must be awful to get to that stage,' Baroness Elsa exclaimed. 'I suppose then you don't mind what you do.'

At the entrance to the town, Erna von Holtz separated from her companions and rode to the Hellers' house. The bell was answered by Frau von Heller herself. She was a little woman, very thin, with high cheek-bones, and not sufficient flesh on her face to balance her features, which appeared disproportionately large. She was meanly dressed, and looked as if she suffered from lack of proper food and sleep. As a matter of fact, she had fought so long in order to make both ends meet, and satisfy everybody in the process, that the struggle had worn her down to the mere physical necessities; all adornments and charm had been ruthlessly annihilated. Her husband, who had been obliged by ill-health to leave the Army before he reached the rank of major, had dropsy, and was as helpless as a child, and infinitely more querulous. His complaints about his 'damn bad luck' were never-ceasing. He behaved as if the Almighty had a special spite against him, and as if in his wife the Deity found a ready collaborator. Frau von Heller was the buffer between her irritable, grumbling husband and the rest of the family. It was therefore not surprising that a hard defensive coating seemed to protect her heart, mind, and shrivelled-up little body. Without it she would probably not have survived the struggle. Though their income was extremely small—even according to Waldberg ideas—the only son had

as a matter of course to go into the Army, and, a *Garde* regiment being out of the question, he had entered a Line regiment stationed in a little town in Posen. The daughters must, equally of course, attend balls, have evening-dresses and other things which entailed expense; otherwise how would they find the chance of meeting and securing the necessary husbands, who would take them off her overworked hands? To her bitter disappointment, Erika had worn the ball-dresses she had scraped and saved to buy, had gone to brilliant entertainments while her mother ate bread and cheese by the light of a tallow dip, had shown herself everywhere, and had failed to secure a single bidder for her fine eyes and penniless person. Now she was past the marriageable age, and anxiety and disappointment had robbed her of all bloom and freshness. Though Frau von Heller tried not to be unjust, she could not help showing resentment that Erika had not made the proper return for the outlay expended upon her, but had been such a signal failure in the matrimonial market.

Erika, on her part, was bitter and discontented. She longed ardently for a husband, for a household of her own, for children, and for love. She became morbid and introspective: instead of helping in the house, she gloated over fiery, unwholesome books treating of illicit passions, affirmed that she was an advocate of free love, and bemoaned her wasted life. Grete had little sympathy with her elder sister, whom she already despised as an 'old maid.' Occasionally Erika joined the *Kranz* and discussed some for-

bidden book with Erna, but as a rule she remained away; it was too humiliating to feel that these other girls were still 'young,' and would probably all secure husbands, while she remained unloved and stranded.

'Good evening, gnädige Frau,' Erna said, curtsying. 'I only wanted to speak a moment to Erika, about a book which she lent me.'

'Erika is out,' Frau von Heller replied in her toneless voice. 'She went after the midday meal to visit Frau Rebner at Hirschweg.'

'Ah well, then it can't have been her bicycle that I saw,' Erna remarked casually. 'I thought her number was 1191.'

'Yes, that is her number. Where did you see it?' Frau von Heller inquired.

'Standing outside the hunting-lodge in the park,' Erna informed her artlessly. 'I thought perhaps she was picking flowers, but though we hunted for her everywhere, she was not to be found, and the lodge is all locked up. I am sorry to have detained you, gnädige Frau.' And with another curtsy, Erna disappeared.

That evening, after the household had gone to bed, Frau von Heller came to her elder daughter's bedroom. It was a dreary little apartment, with its shabby furniture, narrow bedstead, and threadbare ugliness, which the light of a single candle revealed without brightening. Erika was sitting by the window with her face buried on her arms.

She turned as the door opened, and starting hastily to her feet, confronted her mother.

'You were not with Frau Rebner this afternoon,' Frau von Heller said in her hard, expressionless voice. 'You were at the hunting-lodge, and you went there to meet some one, some man.' She did not speak in a tone of query, but made a definite and convinced statement.

The words of denial died on Erika's lips. She stared at her mother with dull, vacant eyes, and her arms dropped to her side.

'Who is it?' the elder woman asked. 'Whom have you been meeting all these weeks when you lied to me and pretended you were at Hirschweg?'

Erika remained rigid and silent: she looked like a large wax figure, in which only the eyes were living.

'Tell me,' her mother reiterated, a red spot burning on each of her prominent cheek-bones. 'I will have the truth now, and lies will avail you nothing.' She seized her daughter's limp arms, as if she would drag the truth out of her physically: 'What is his name?'

Erika gazed wildly round the room, like some caged animal looking for a means of escape, and then, with a baffled cry, flung herself on to the bed, and burst into uncontrolled sobs.

'Hush, hush,' her mother whispered, kneeling by her side. 'You must not wake Grete. Pull yourself together and tell me everything. You must. Who is it who has ruined you?' the whole miserable little body trembled under the restraint she was enforcing upon herself.

The figure on the bed raised its face, disfigured with despair, and muttered just audibly, 'Herr von Dresel.'

'That man!' Frau von Heller exclaimed, starting. 'Good heavens! he has a wife and family.' She sank on a chair. 'Married!' she muttered incoherently. 'The brute—the hypocrite—with his airs of propriety and his fat, red face. How could you? Where did you meet him? How did it happen?'

'I met him first at Frau Rebner's,' Erika whispered thickly. The words seemed to stick in her throat, and she had to moisten her full, pale lips before she could articulate. 'He is her cousin, and he used to bicycle back with me——' she hesitated, and looked vaguely round the room.

'Go on, go on,' Frau von Heller urged. 'What happened then? How did you become intimate?'

'I forget how it first began,' Erika replied in a dazed voice, putting her hand to her head. 'We had long talks together, and he said that my youth was slipping away without happiness—that nobody would thank me for renouncing love when I was a withered old maid—that we were affinities, that he was unhappy too, and that he would teach me what happiness really is like——' She stopped abruptly, and stared with hopeless, blind misery at the cowering figure of her mother.

'Yes—and then?'

'And then he asked me to meet him at the hunting-lodge, of which he has a key. He said nobody would ever know, and I should feel afterwards that my youth had not been entirely wasted. That it was not sin, but the reunion of two souls through the bodies.'

'Not sin!' Frau von Heller cried violently. 'I

should like to strangle the brute with my own hands.'

Erika looked at her mother in amazement. It had never occurred to her that so much passion lived in that shrivelled, worn-out body.

'And leaving your bicycle outside,' she moaned, 'for every one who passed to see.'

'To-day is the first time I did so,' Erika sobbed. 'It was usually hidden in the woods.' She had grown careless in the practice of sin, careless of her safety, as she had grown careless of everything else which matters.

'You have ruined your whole family,' Frau von Heller said with dreary finality. 'Ruined—ruined. We must send for Felix at once. Of course he must challenge that—Dresel—immediately. We are dishonoured, disgraced, ruined.' She got unsteadily on to her feet, and without another word, or another look at the huddled figure on the bed, groped her way out of the room.

It was early morning when a carriage might have been seen wending its way along the smooth white road bisecting the royal deer park. The air was sharp and strong, and full of the fresh, earthy scent of the woods. Everything looked alive and joyous, with a vitality which almost hurt one of the occupants of the slowly moving vehicle.

Felix von Heller was a youth of twenty-one, crude and immature even for his age. Buried in a wretched little garrison on the Polish frontier, he had responded with alacrity to the summons which had come for him to return to his home

and avenge his sister's honour. An ordinary, commonplace, little lieutenant, he suddenly felt that he had become a person of vast importance, the representative of his family, the knight who by his valour would wipe the stain from the family honour. He had lived in a glamour of exaltation in which death or disaster played no part. He would, of course, be victorious; he would require the blood of this great hulking wretch to atone for the grievous wrong he had inflicted.

The reaction from such a state of mind was inevitable. Felix glanced at the two friends who were standing by him in this, the most serious event of his life, and he felt the sudden conviction that it was their last drive together. 'Die, die, die,' the wheels seemed to repeat, as they crunched the gravel of the road. The certainty that death was before him gripped him in a sudden revulsion. He felt giddy and sick, and his past life, empty as it had been, appeared to him delectable as a vanished dream. Why should he, at the threshold of his possibilities, be suddenly obliterated, thrown out of a life which he coveted, and had not yet explored? And for no fault of his own.

'We are nearly there,' one of his friends said, breaking the almost tangible silence. 'The others must have already arrived. I can see the fresh marks of wheels in the road.'

Felix felt the blood rush to his head and sing in his ears. The horses seemed now to be tearing madly, hurrying him on to death. He looked at every tree and shrub they passed, taking an individual farewell of each. How queer it seemed to think that on the return drive everything would

look precisely the same, only he would have ceased to exist.

The carriage stopped with a jerk, and his two friends got out, carefully lifting a square box which had been hidden under the seat.

They found themselves in a large, open clearing surrounded by trees, the grass-covered ground shining with dew. Four figures were already assembled there. Felix fixed his eyes on one of these. He was kneeling on the ground before a case, out of which he produced wads of lint, bandages, and mysterious little phials.

'All this will be no good for me,' Felix thought. 'No doctor can do anything against death.'

A large, corpulent man, with red rolls of fat round his bull neck, was talking unconcernedly with the two other persons. Had it not been for the presence of the square wooden box, lying on the grass between them, it might have been imagined that all three were taking an early morning constitutional, and had stopped to discuss some knotty question. At the approach of von Heller and his friends they separated. The fat man, whom Felix at once realised must be his adversary, Herr von Dresel, strolled across to the doctor. The four others talked softly together. Felix looked at them from a little distance and tried to concentrate his thoughts, which were wandering in an absurd manner. He wondered vaguely why Freddy von Engelsberg—who had been with him in the Cadet-school and was now one of his seconds—did not stop talking to those strangers and come over to his side. He felt very lonely, and the whole scene was like some vague

nightmare, which appears quite harmless, and is yet full of an overwhelming and indefinite terror.

Von Engelsberg and one of the strangers, after exchanging the two wooden boxes, opened the lids, and the glint of steel flashed across to Felix. They lifted the pistols out of their cases, examined them carefully, then nodded their heads. Meanwhile the other two were slowly pacing the ground in opposite directions. Suddenly they both stopped, and each stuck a walking-stick into the soft grass.

'If only they would hurry,' Felix thought feverishly. 'What is the good of all these formalities when I am going to be killed?'

Herr von Dresel strolled leisurely back. The four seconds had finished their preliminaries.

'For the last time, will the gentlemen be reconciled?'

Felix was only half conscious of a hoarse 'No' escaping his lips, and, looking across, saw the huge head of his adversary rolling like an ugly Western mandarin.

'Fifteen paces distance, and to continue until *Kampfunfähigkeit*.'

Von Heller felt convinced that the 'incapacity for fighting longer' would occur for him at the first shot. His adversary was so devilishly calm and unconcerned, and he had heard accounts of his excellence with a pistol.

The two groups separated. Felix was led by his seconds to one of the walking-sticks.

'Keep up your spirits,' von Engelsberg whispered encouragingly. 'You have a big enough target. Aim carefully, not too high; and directly you hear the *Commando*, fire.'

The adversaries were now facing one another. Felix raised his right arm—if only it did not shake. It was quite steady, his whole being was frozen into a dazed rigidity, but a film seemed to form over his eyes, and he could focus nothing.

'Are you ready?' A voice rang out of the mist which he felt surrounding him on all sides, and, after a pause, the sharp word of command smote his ears, as if it already came from another world.

There were two reports, breaking the innocent silence of the woods, two wisps of smoke curling over the trees, and the frightened twitter of disturbed birds.

One of the adversaries stood erect and motionless, as he lowered his smoking pistol: the other looked like a heap of clothes thrown on to the green sward.

'He is not dead?' von Engelsberg asked breathlessly.

'No, but his hand is shattered to pieces,' the doctor mumbled, bending over the motionless figure.

The von Heller family, realising that Waldberg could no longer be their home, had rented a small house, with a little strip of garden, in a deserted Pomeranian village. As soon as Felix could be moved, they would migrate with all their household gods, and hide themselves in a place where nobody had heard of their ruin and dishonour.

Meanwhile Felix was lying desperately ill in the Military Hospital. Mortification had set in, and the doctors announced that the arm must be

amputated at the shoulder. During the time when he lay delirious, and, his mother feared, dying, the whole family lived in an isolation as complete as if they had already buried themselves in the Pomeranian wilderness. No one came near them, they were now social lepers, with whom intercourse would be regarded as contamination.

The girls were only following the example of their elders when they withdrew hastily from their unfortunate *Kranz* friends, and one day, when Grete almost ran into Erna von Holtz and Baroness Elsa in the Königstrasse, the two girls hurriedly turned aside, and pretended to be absorbed in the contents of a shop-window.

The habits of rats on sinking ships are those adopted by German society. A breath of misfortune and distress will scatter your friends and acquaintances, and it matters little whether you are the offender or the offended, provided that circumstances are against you.

'I am very sorry for poor Grete, I am sure,' Erna said to Baroness Elsa, as they saw their ex-friend and boon companion hurry away down a back street. 'But, of course, after what has happened it is impossible to know her any longer.'

The only person who was kind-hearted and humane enough to have visited the Hellers in their trouble was the Gräfin von Rühlheim-Hochburg, and she was so absorbed in her work, that the events of the town passed by her almost unheeded.

Marcia, infuriated by the attitude adopted by Waldberg society, would have liked to show her

friendship for Grete; and once, when she saw her in the distance, hurried up to ask if they might walk together. Grete, however, wounded and sensitive, imagined that the English Mees wished to gloat over her misfortune, and revenge herself for past slights; and ignoring the outstretched hand, she passed on without a sign of recognition.

The following week the entire family quitted the town which had been their home for so many years; and though they quitted it never to return, there was not a soul to wish them Godspeed, or to utter a regret for their departure.

In the desolate little Pomeranian village the von Hellers eked out a miserable existence. The dropsical father, whose sole pleasure in life had been a daily game of *Skat* with two retired Generals, complained unceasingly and bitterly of the curse of his family and the cruelty and injustice of his God. If he had been difficult to manipulate before, he became almost impossible now, and his uncontrolled anger increased with the inflated size of his limbs.

Frau von Heller, a mere shadow, with eyes from which even sorrow and despair were extinguished, slaved with the hopeless determination of an expiring beast of burden. She hardly ever spoke to Erika, who slunk away by herself, a neglected figure, who had cast away even the external decencies of life. Grete also avoided her sister, rarely even bestowing a glance upon her; she felt that if she did, the temptation to strike her might be too strong. The younger girl had become worn and embittered. Her life was completely wrecked. Who would marry her or even

see her in this dreary, deserted hole? What future was there for her to look forward to but the penniless doom of an old maid?

Felix, with his empty coat-sleeve hanging limply by his side, loafed aimlessly round the house and the bare strip of garden, in which only a few cabbages and a stunted fruit-tree grew. Unshaven and unkempt, he would brood morosely, unable to read, or to piece together the fragments of his shattered life. He was done for, a maimed log—if only the bullet had been more merciful, and had terminated instead of mutilating his life. Every evening he slouched off to the 'Golden Apple,' the village beer-house. There he would find a retired major with a bloated face, who lived with his housekeeper, and beat her regularly on his return home; and a degenerate member of the aristocracy who farmed a small property near, and was on the verge of delirium tremens. With these companions Felix von Heller would drink stolidly and systematically from eight to twelve every night, although the operation appeared to afford none of them the slightest pleasure.

And thus the entire von Heller family went to swell the number of ruined existences which every year drop out of German society, and disappear in an inglorious oblivion.

In one short season how many of the members of that community which considered itself the cream of Waldberg had mysteriously and irrevocably disappeared 'round the corner'? Otto von Brösewick had fled his country and sought refuge in an African colony, where his dissipated body succumbed to the first onslaught of fever.

Walther von Vogelschwink had put a bullet through his brain; and Graf Ernst, escaping ignominy by prompt flight, had thrown in his lot with a South American adventuress. As to Graf Max Radwitz—who knows whether the charms of the beautiful Suzanna sufficed to console him for the ostracism from his family and social equals, and the sacrifice of position, prestige, flattery, and privileges, which are the birthright of the German officer?

CHAPTER XX

'AND must you really leave us this week?' the Gräfin asked Marcia, in tones of genuine regret.

'I am afraid I must. You see my parents will be back, and besides, I have paid you such a visitation that I feel quite ashamed of myself.'

'It has been a very great pleasure to me,' the Gräfin said, with that amiable courtesy of voice and manner which made the eccentricities of her attire appear unessential. 'I have long wished to have the daughter of my dear school friend to stay with me,—I shall feel indeed lonely after you are gone. As it is, we are a sadly diminished household.'

This was the only reference the Gräfin had ever made to Ernst's departure, but Marcia knew the pain his callousness had inflicted, and would have liked to express a few words of sympathy. The Gräfin, however, despite her ingenuous candour, was unapproachable in certain respects, and kept her sorrows and humiliations rigidly to herself.

'I cannot tell you how much I have enjoyed my visit, and how grateful I am to you for all your kindness to me,' Marcia said with feeling.

'My dear child, I have had a daughter to enliven me and keep me company,' the Gräfin replied affectionately. They were both feeling quite emotional when the bell rang, and Karl

announced that Baroness Elsa von Dörring and the two Fräuleins von Holtz had called to see the English Mees.

The remaining members of the *Kranz* were so delighted at the joyful news of Marcia's imminent departure that they had buried the hatchet, and determined to call and express their regrets, and offer their assistance in packing.

'Thank goodness she is leaving without having caught one of the men!' Baroness Elsa exclaimed delightedly.

'Yes; and now that she is going, we may just as well make ourselves agreeable,' Erna replied. 'Besides, I should like to see her things. I might be able to get a few hints.'

'We have come to help the Mees pack,' Baroness Elsa said, curtsying to the Gräfin, 'and to tell her how very sorry we are she is leaving Waldberg.'

'That is very kind of you,' the Gräfin replied. 'I am sure the Mees will be glad of your assistance.'

'Thanks very much,' Marcia said coolly. 'I am quite used to doing my packing alone.' She was disgusted at this sudden demonstration of amiability on the part of girls who had barely disguised their hostility to her in the past.

'Oh, but you must let us help you,' Erna cried effusively. 'We will take no denial.'

'Yes, my dear Mees, it is a very good idea,' the Gräfin observed benignly. 'You young things must have plenty to talk about, and I have some work to do.' She pushed Marcia gently through the door, and the noble young ladies crowded

after her. In the circumstances, it was impossible to turn them out without hurting and annoying the Gräfin.

Cries of admiration greeted the sight of Marcia's dressing-table. Silver toilet appliances were unknown extravagances in Waldberg. Frau von Holtz had an ebony hand-mirror and brush, with coronets—she could only boast of five points—upon them, but this was considered a sinful luxury and waste of money.

Marcia now underwent the torture of having all her possessions pried into and fingered. The three girls rummaged everywhere, and inspected everything with an unblushing impertinence which made her inwardly rage. They had divested themselves of their outdoor garments, and were busily employed in trying on various articles of Marcia's wardrobe.

'Look at this, Sophie,' Erna cried, dragging down a delicately tinted 'ninon' skirt, and trying to force it over her ample hips. 'This is just the sort of thing to suit me, only it looks a little faded. If Frau Heffenmeyer copied that in rose-pink, with a nice bright underskirt, it would look really smart.'

'What on earth is this?' Sophie cried, pulling out a cream-coloured Empire tea-gown, which Marcia had brought, unaware of the fact that such a garment is about as useless in the Fatherland as muslins at the North Pole. After she had explained its uses, the young ladies first declared it most immodest, and no better than a night-dress, and then each insisted upon trying it on in turn.

Marcia, who had an unusually pronounced distaste for her things being handled and worn by others, looked on in disgusted resentment.

'No, what a hideous thing!' Baroness Elsa exclaimed, standing in front of the glass, and surveying her squat, shapeless figure, round which the Empire gown hung limply. 'To think that they make such frights of themselves in England!'

'It is hardly made for such figures as yours,' Marcia replied tartly. She felt that her patience would soon be exhausted.

'Of course, if one is so thin, the more one hides one's figure the better,' Sophie remarked spitefully. 'We don't admire that sort of thing at all here.'

Meanwhile Erna was rummaging about among the underlinen, uttering cries of astonishment.

'Look, look!' she exclaimed. 'Lace on everything, and such lace! Why, it will all be torn the first time it is washed. And such funny clothes! I have never seen anything like them before.'

Elsa and Sophie rushed up to behold the wonders, and burrowed among the piled-up garments like excited and curious moles.

'No chemises,' Elsa muttered, looking completely baffled. 'And such thin material! Why, one would be frozen.'

'And they will last no time at all,' Erna exclaimed in disgust. 'We have our clothes made of stuff which can never tear. And they call the English a practical nation! Our underclothes last us until we are married, and then our *Aussteuer* lasts us for the rest of our lives.'

'And pray what is this?' Elsa inquired, examining the indiarubber bath which was hanging up to dry outside the window.

Marcia, who had sat down on the edge of the bed, realising the impossibility of dislodging these intruders before they chose to go, wearily explained.

'How ridiculous to have a bath every day!' Baroness Elsa cried scornfully. 'Besides, I suppose you know it is very bad for the health and the complexion.'

'Yes, do you remember poor Laura von Weinbrandt?' Sophie interrupted.

'I was just going to tell the Mees about her. She was at a school in England where they made all the girls take a bath daily. When poor Laura came back, her face was covered with spots, and the doctor said he knew she had been going in for those absurd English customs of washing.'

'Yes, he said to Laura's mamma, "These English will kill one with their mad ideas about fresh air and water. The reason they are considered a strong nation is because the weak ones can't stand such treatment and die,"' Sophie concluded, glancing at the Mees to see the effect of this veracious history upon her.

'We have a bathroom in our house,' Erna observed proudly. 'But of course we shouldn't dream of using it frequently. In the winter it is dangerous; one so easily catches cold.'

'And in the summer we go to the swimming-bath,' Sophie interposed.

'But of course it is a nice thing to have,' Erna remarked with an air of superiority. 'Most of the

flats here haven't got such a thing, only the very modern and expensive ones.'

'I don't think it is such a great advantage,' Elsa retorted disdainfully. 'We have never missed not having a bathroom.'

'And what do you think of the German gentlemen, Mees?' Erna inquired, rubbing her nails with Marcia's polisher.

'Oh, they are very nice,' the latter said evasively.

'Particularly Herr von Seltenstein,' Erna continued with a nonchalance which she considered masterly. 'A pity he left so suddenly for Berlin!'

All the young ladies fixed their eyes upon Marcia, anxious to see her confusion. To their great disappointment she remained perfectly cool. 'A great pity,' she replied unconcernedly, 'except that I should imagine life in Berlin would be preferable to life in Waldberg.'

'Ah, you would have liked to live there,' Sophie cried. 'It is very sad when we cannot get what we want.'

Marcia raised her eyebrows. 'I have no desire to live in Berlin, or anywhere out of my native country.'

'Ah, I expect that depends upon circumstances,' Erna observed with impertinent scepticism.

Meanwhile Sophie's eyes had been wandering over everything. 'Oh, how pretty!' she cried, pointing to one of those brightly coloured cardboard boxes which are inevitably associated with sweets. Marcia opened it and offered the contents to her visitors.

'Bonbons! How delicious! Why, I thought it contained your jewels,' Sophie exclaimed in

affected surprise, helping herself as copiously as she dared.

'I dote on sweetmeats,' Baroness Elsa murmured with her mouth full. 'Only good ones are so terribly expensive.'

'Perhaps you would like the whole box,' Marcia said, pushing it not very graciously towards her.

After many expostulations, and asserting that she really could not accept such a gift, Baroness Elsa seized it with alacrity, and glancing at the little silver clock, appeared filled with consternation. 'I had no idea how late it was,' she cried. 'I shall be late for *Mittagessen*.'

'We must go too,' Erna said. 'I am sorry, Mees, we cannot help you any longer.'

'That leather bag will be ruined in travelling,' Sophie remarked spitefully, as she drew on her gloves. She was much annoyed that Elsa had secured the sweets instead of herself. 'It should have a holland cover. I made one for mamma's last birthday, and embroidered it with *Gute Reise* and a coronet in red cross-stitch. It looked most elegant.'

'Yes; and then when you travel people see the coronet, and know you are somebody,' Elsa observed, struggling with the elastic which secured her round felt hat upon her head.

'Well, we really must go now,' Erna repeated, moving to the door. 'We are very glad to have been of assistance to you, Mees.'

'And we are coming to see you off,' Sophie informed her.

'Please, don't trouble,' Marcia exclaimed in alarm. 'There is never any time for conversa-

tion at a railway station. Perhaps it would be better to say good-bye now.'

'Oh dear no; we are all coming,' Erna said firmly. They were quite determined to see the last of the English Mees, and assure themselves with their own eyes that she had really left Waldberg.

It was a glorious day when the Gräfin and Marcia drove down the Kampfstrasse on their way to the station. The rows of fine lime-trees perfumed the air deliciously, and the flower-filled gardens formed a brilliant border of colour on either side of the street.

'How pretty and gay it looks,' Marcia observed with appreciation. 'I am sorry to be leaving.'

'And I am sorry you are going,' the Gräfin said regretfully. 'However, you must come again some other time.'

'And you must come to England, one May or June, when London is gay and the country beautiful. I should like to show it all to you,' Marcia exclaimed.

The Gräfin shook her head: 'Indeed I should like to, Mees, but I am afraid it is not possible. I have never been on the sea in my life, and it would be too adventurous to begin now.'

To Marcia, who had travelled since she was born, this seemed a ridiculous objection, but to the Gräfin it appeared insurmountable. She had the inland German's fear and distrust of the sea, and would only have ventured herself upon it under compulsion.

Marcia was able to take her ticket and register

her luggage before the arrival of those who were coming to see her off. Karl, grasping her small luggage in his cotton-gloved hands, stood beaming ecstatically on the platform. He had received a bigger tip from the English Mees than he had ever hoped for in his wildest dreams.

There was a great clatter of hoofs outside the station, and Baron Hennig and von Megersdorf rode up, followed by their orderlies, who held the horses while their masters dismounted. The two officers strode on to the platform, amid the obsequious salutations of the cabdrivers and porters, with a soldier-servant in their wake carrying two bouquets swathed in tissue paper.

'Ah, gnädiges Fräulein,' Hennig exclaimed, clicking his spurred heels together, 'this is indeed sad. All Waldberg will mourn your departure.'

'Gnädiges Fräulein must return. We shall look forward to that,' Megersdorf said, giving Marcia a sentimental glance out of his pleasant blue eyes.

She thought how imposing they both looked in their smart, well-cut uniforms, their beautiful, high riding-boots, and their white, doeskin gloves. It was difficult to realise that these were the same men whom she had seen last in grotesque *Civil*, looking more like out-of-work waiters than anything else.

'We have brought Gnädiges Fräulein little *Reisebouquets*,' Hennig said, taking the parcels from his servant. The soldier stood rigid, his hands pressed tightly against the seams of his trousers.

'You can go,' Hennig said, waving him off.

The man saluted with the abrupt rigidity of a clockwork figure, turned on his heel and marched down the platform.

Marcia thanked them for the two huge bunches of wired roses and maidenhair fern, and thought what a frightful nuisance they were at the present moment.

'Ah, there are the young ladies,' the Gräfin exclaimed. 'They are always thinking of giving others pleasure.'

Baroness Elsa and Erna von Holtz came up the platform arm-in-arm. Directly they caught sight of the officers, they began to giggle and whisper affectedly.

'Sophie is very sorry she couldn't come,' Erna said, after greeting everybody. 'But she has a *verdorbenen Magen.*' Marcia had not been able to accustom herself to the use of such an expression in public, but she found that the German thinks nothing of discussing the condition of his 'stomach,' when he would be horrified at the mention of such indelicate things as 'legs' or 'feet.'

Having plucked up his courage now that the dangerous Mees was about to remove herself, Uli also appeared upon the scene, and actually presented Marcia with a little bunch of violets. After such an incriminating piece of gallantry, he hastily retired behind his mother. 'I believe he is afraid I shall propose to him in the middle of the platform,' Marcia thought.

Elsa and Erna, who were secretly enraged that Baron Hennig and Herr von Megersdorf devoted their attentions exclusively to the English Mees, consoled themselves with the reflection that she

would soon be gone, and that they would then have the field to themselves. 'If only she does not come back,' they both thought. They even did not grudge her an English husband, provided he kept her away from Waldberg.

'How smart gnädiges Fräulein looks in her travelling costume,' Hennig remarked in his most sugary tones.

'Gnädiges Fräulein always looks charming,' Megersdorf asserted.

The two girls sniggered spitefully, and tried to hide their annoyance.

Only the Gräfin was unusually silent, and looked at Marcia quite sadly.

The conversation was desultory and unsatisfactory, as conversations on railway platforms usually are, and everybody was rather relieved when the express rounded the curve, and panted into the station.

Marcia, having selected a corner seat in a non-smoking compartment, and placed her dressing-case upon it, re-descended on to the platform to make her *adieux*.

'There is a "Frauen" compartment a little further on,' Elsa informed her, 'where you will surely secure a seat.'

'Thanks, I prefer not,' Marcia replied. 'I find women object even more to fresh air than men, and I always have my window open.'

Fresh air and male society appeared to be such a shocking combination that the young ladies could only roll their eyes, and murmur something about their mammas not allowing such a thing.

'Good-bye, my dear Mees,' the Gräfin said,

pushing up her green veil and embracing Marcia affectionately. 'Take care of yourself, and pay me another visit whenever your parents can spare you.'

'Yes, gnädiges Fräulein, you must,' Hennig and Megersdorf exclaimed, pressing round and kissing Marcia's hand.

'I expect the Mees will not want to leave Old England for some time,' Erna observed, proffering a hot little nosegay of faded syringa.

'Good-bye, Mees,' Baroness Elsa said. 'You know I collect picture postcards, and have not got a single one of England.'

'*Gute Reise*, gnädiges Fräulein,' Uli murmured, taking Marcia's hand with the intention of kissing it, and on second thoughts dropping it hastily.

'Take your seats! Take your seats!' cried a grand official in uniform and a scarlet cap.

Marcia climbed into the train and stood at the corridor window, round which the party had grouped themselves.

The Gräfin looked quite pale, but Marcia was not sure whether it was emotion or the effect of her green veil. One of her cotton-gloved hands rested affectionately on Uli's arm, and with the other she grasped a large coroneted pocket-handkerchief, which she waved gently as the train glided out of the station.

Baron Hennig, Herr von Megersdorf, and Uli stood erect, the blue of their uniforms and the silver of their buttons shining in the sun, their hands raised in a military salute.

Erna von Holtz and Baroness Elsa, arm-in-

arm, could hardly repress their delighted relief, and before the train had disappeared round a bend had turned to the officers with some coy and encouraging remarks. Their rival had left the field, and left it empty-handed. A few perishable flowers, and a few still more perishable compliments, were all, they thought, that she was carrying back with her to the country which they had learned to regard as the rival of their glorious Fatherland.

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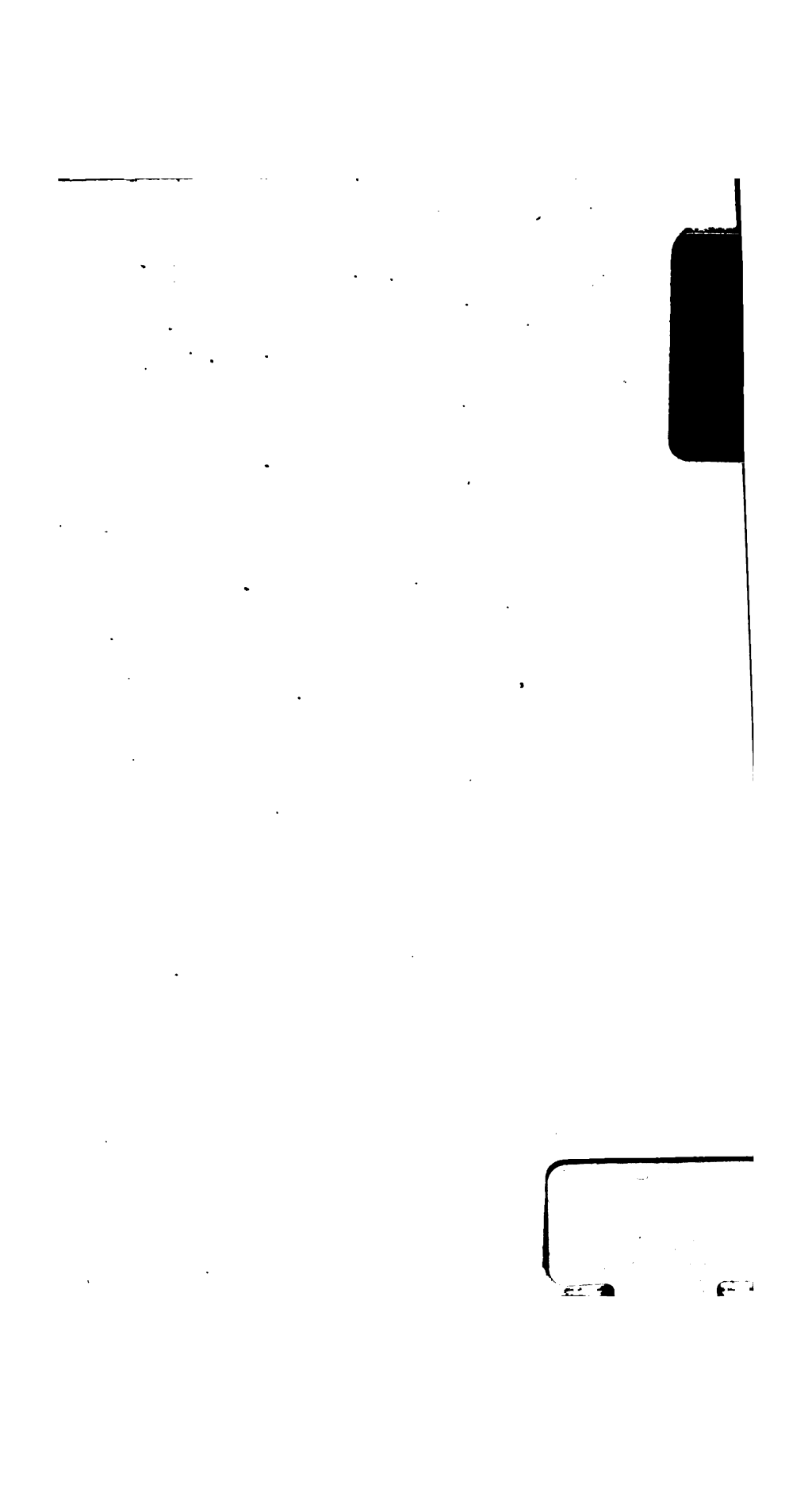
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